

sons

of

the

fathers

BY MARTIN KRAMER

the hearth and the strangeness
sons of the fathers

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of
the
fathers

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to

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the esthetes, so young

spring semester

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they would touch truth

august

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they would engage the enemy

winter and spring

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spring semester

the
esthetes,
so .
young

a weekend in february

Mrs. McNaughton had been a librarian almost all her life, because, long before they certified her as one, she'd been by instinct precisely that: a librarian.

By the Friday afternoon in February, 1914, when she drove her 1919 model A from Berkley to Sacramento—her hope being to attend a beautiful death—she'd been, also, for twenty years the mother of an irritatingly precocious son, for three years the widow of a heavily ministerial husband, and, for just one season, a victim of the menopause. These conditions she endured with a peculiar reliable dowdy patience as characteristic as her oxfords. She drove her car as you'd suppose, with the windows up except for signals, and the doors locked. She was respectfully aware that a driver's license in the State of California was a privilege and not a right.

Regardless of what she'd written on the little printed form when requesting a couple of days' leave from the library, she was making this trip not nearly so much because a decrepit and unfamiliar uncle of hers lay awaiting death in a shabby house, as because once, thirty-five years earlier, a glamorous tycoon had crossed half a continent for a family reunion and had brought with him a locket for her, studded with rubies, hinged so as to open on a picture of herself, and engraved on the back with her name. It was the sole piece of jewelry

in a heaven-bound childhood, and she could remember still every sparkle of her delight. *How kind*, she told herself, *how kind that was of him*; certainly she'd have grown a tear or two, had she been familiar with the road.

Her Uncle William had become generic to her, in 1899, and remained so ever since: she admitted mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, flowers, dogs to be various, altogether unlike one another, aunts especially could be rich or poor, cross or gay, but all uncles were simply he, and if a childhood lacked an uncle, she knew the childhood had been cheated. His voice had boomed, he'd been omnipotent and jolly, and she'd kept him precisely so in her mind throughout the years, safe, no later visits having intervened to corrupt the image. She knew he'd lost his money long since, just on the single enormous mistake of expecting Wilson to keep us out of war, and she knew he'd later fled the East to shelter for a while in Oregon, finally to be pushed to California; but these things were not so real as the first Uncle William had been, and her mind stopped there.

Never had it been within her range to be to anyone what he had been, during that one visit, to her: she was dry and gray and economical to the bone, and even felt herself to be these things. Nor did she have any idea at all of repaying him. Her only hope was that if she stood by the bed and said his name—she saw it mistily yet humbly—he might recall a little the man he'd been at his best, as successful as gold, and the final going would be eased with pride. She couldn't help wondering if anyone would ever trouble to do as much for her; she decided it unlikely.

Her scrubbed, earnest, conscientious-looking hands touched her son's discarded bathrobe, warm on her lap. Before leaving, she'd made oatmeal cookies and lemonade for him to share with his college friends that night. "On the sideboard," she had told him; and, "in the refrigerator. It's been sugared, but may want another stirring. . . ." Possibly he hadn't heard. . . . The other day she'd found, in the wastebasket, a scrap from one of his poems:

My mother's voice suggests the hope
Doom may be averted if we'll sacrifice
All sleep and luxury.

Her tone, not words
Her tone, not words suggests

The hope.

Say what Doom, Mother?
In the morning, or the fearful night?
Name what Doom you guess, worried mother-voice.

The eyes bleeding or is your choice
some softening granite in moist bones?
If I cleanse myself
a hundred times a day

can I be certified
guaranteed
Eternal

Indestructible?

Warn me with coherence, worried mother-voice.

And it had left her troubled; she always *tried*, heaven knew, to sound cheerful.

She imagined herself suggesting that he not show off so much; for once he began listening to her seriously, and she spoke quite wisely. She rejected the term "show-off"; instead she chose—she said—

She begged him in a telepathic way to remember that other people lived in the apartment house: *It is possible, you know, to have a good time and to be good boys also!* Then she saw the "good boys" would not be right; instead she would rephrase it as—

She was a little anxious, too, that her furniture might get scuffed: she didn't feel she knew them well at all, those friends of his. They painted, most of them; they thought they'd be painters. She knew it was foolish, and reminded herself it was, to suppose that because people liked to paint they weren't so apt to be respectable citizens as, say, librarians. Nevertheless, after arguing this point a while, sorting and rejecting evidence, she sighed.

She hoped they'd sing college songs, considerately, softly; she hoped they'd notice the book collection, and wouldn't pity their host for that little limp he had.

She hoped Virgil Benthwick would be there: Virgil stood, English

and well-mannered to his very hair, whenever she entered a room; he had a certain quality.

And most earnestly of all she hoped they would not smoke.

For his party the widow's son bought three packages of cigarettes.

He was long and thin, dark and old-looking. His favorite mannerism was to feign languor, with face and body and voice and eyes. He had perfected this pose: it was his. None of his friends—he was their leader—encroached on it, though all admired it profoundly. No one was ever hearty with him, or at least no one was ever hearty with him twice: heartiness caused him to look as though he might at any moment perish, fade away, really dissolve from boredom. Epigrams were saved and polished for him; if, hearing, he bothered to pull down a corner of his mouth or if his dark heavy-lidded eyes gleamed one moment, he was understood to have indicated approval: whoever had spoken could legitimately begin thinking of himself as an intellectual.

Paintings and sketches and carvings were brought to him, shown him timidly, because, though he could neither paint nor sketch nor carve, his opinion was valued by the young university esthetes far above their professors' opinions. (Writings were not brought; he had no tolerance in him for writers: *he* wrote.) He was respected partly because he looked right—not at all healthy, cadaverous even, with luminous haunted eyes, and with such bones and pallor as might have put El Greco into ecstasy. And partly because he sounded right—frequently almost inaudible; and when the words did come out clear the sense quite often didn't. He had not been abroad, or to New York, but he represented, both to his friends and to himself, the personification of advanced Parisian thought and Greenwich Village world-weariness. Indeed, upon registering to enter the university, and lacking at that time still a month before turning eighteen, he'd described himself on the matriculation form as a Futelist. (By now, twenty and a junior, he should certainly have preferred "a thrice-dipped Baptist, staunchly Republican," but was not asked these things every year.) To his mother's horror, he owned a copy of *Ulysses*; he'd evolved a couple of fairly original theories about Ger-

trude Stein; several professors were impressed enough with him to invite him to their homes for tea; there wasn't a Freudian symbol he couldn't identify, or a line of T. S. Eliot he could come to for the first time; he himself wrote both intelligible and completely, vividly unintelligible poetry, and he limped. He limped with a kind of accidental precision, to the precisely right degree, not quite so much, for example, as Maugham's Philip in *Of Human Bondage*.

He condemned Renoir as a sugar-sucking sentimentalist and Thomas Wolfe as a meat-eating sentimentalist.

• When he said, or rather chanted, in his gravely melodious voice, with his head turned aside, "Come and sit with us among the doilies Friday night, gentle friend. There'll be hot blood to drink and goodies for all. Bring any little monstrous thing you've done: we'll spit on it," his invitation was construed as an honor by the chosen.

They promised to come, all five of them.

First came Johnny Rue, the social blunder, the always-to-be-overlooked, the never-to-be-invited; he came on time out of ignorance and terror. He did not walk around and around the block before climbing the apartment house stairs: the neighborhood demanded his invisibility.

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•
Marion McNaughton smelt the fear on him as he let him in the door, and experienced such shame and pity for him he could not quite be civil. "I'll not be the gracious host!" he snarled, exasperated into loudness, "I'll not be any rotten gracious host, do you hear?"

He took Johnny's leather jacket, very worn, and rolled it into a ball and threw it on the couch and glared at him. Johnny grinned and nodded, to show he thought this behavior very clever; but McNaughton, who did see, after all, nearly everything, caught the special tightness of his facial muscles and saw how the eyes had gone a trifle protuberant, the whites too noticeable. Suddenly he wanted to cry, to fling his arms around Rue and to insist he'd done nothing, never in his life had he done anything to make him afraid to be here, *would* never do anything, and for Christ's *sake* not to be afraid! "I can smell you, I can smell you being afraid, I can see you making yourself smaller! Now stop it!" he roared silently, his face beseeching trust.

•
Johnny Rue licked his lips and advanced toward the radiator and

crouched before it. "There's a real cold wind out tonight, man. I mean it's *blowin'*!" He stood with his back to the radiator. "Off the bay. A hell of a wind from off the bay."

McNaughton stared in amazement: the ladies, and the ladylike gentlemen, the social arbiters who were responsible for Johnny's being afraid—this is what those very people were forever saying; the weather, you talked about the weather if any moment looked to go sour or uncomfortable. McNaughton had heard his mother use the weather for five or ten minutes at a stretch at church socials; nothing had ever begun to be one half so safe as the weather. And now, fooling neither of them even slightly, Johnny tried to do as his enemies said to do; he was obedient to them humbly! *here!* in McNaughton's own place! "May they defile, oh may they defile," he whispered passionately, "your maternal grandmother's grave!"

Johnny smiled, and McNaughton saw with relief that the muscles had relaxed a little. "I'd've had a hell of a time finding it, if you hadn't give me that map. I'm not familiar with this part of Berkeley, oddly enough. Why you want it my maternal grandmother's grave, McNaughton? My dad's is the only side of the family I ever cared anythin' about."

Marion chortled for that—and grew warm with affection toward all of them, all of Johnny's race. "Kill the bastards who tell you you're children," he instructed calmly, "but listen to this: you *have* that kind of youthfulness, you really do, that shows you're just beginning. You can go anywhere. You can knock it all out and start over, the whole tiresome works, and start over." He shook his head admiringly, "The *energy!* Oh Christ, what energy in you people!"

Pleased-embarrassed, Johnny looked at the floor. Last night he'd worked as pin-boy at the bowling alley until after one o'clock, he'd studied hard at the university all day, this evening he'd had a difficult time finding McNaughton's place, had been scared as a deserted lamb until this moment; and now to hear his energy praised made him suddenly feel exhausted. He knew it would be better to sit down without being told to, but on the other hand there might be some special chair that was exclusively for McNaughton's mother or for someone like that, and he might happen to choose it. He stood.

But McNaughton, unconcerned now—if there were to be further shyness, there would just have to be: he was bored by it—began at

this moment unfolding his own long length into one of the chairs. When he had quite collapsed, there was a knock at the door. He waved a hand toward the entrance, and then in Johnny's direction; and nodded but did not rise, as if helpless with ennui.

Johnny Rue pretended, however, not to understand his instructions and would not oblige by answering the door. He sat down quickly. After all, how was he to know who knocked? Might it not be some neighbor, or the manager of the building?

McNaughton moaned, "Oh join us, yes join us, yes do."

• But whoever stood behind the door must not have heard (and it wouldn't have been easy to hear: the door was reasonably thick, the moan soft) for no one entered. Immediately McNaughton realized his next guest could be neither George Morley—George Morley III—who almost never knocked but just entered wherever he wished to enter, nor his own closest and most respected friend, Virgil Benthwick, because Virgil, like himself, heard what was not easy to hear and saw what was not easy to see. Who stood on the other side of the door must be either Terrence Collin, excessively timid partly by reason of excessive beauty, or Robb Nixon, timid for the reason of being a freak. He realized he did not wish to be with further shyness at the moment, indeed *could* not be with further shyness: the doilies would conquer them all. He rose, went to the kitchen, poured himself and Johnny glasses of wine and muttered defiantly, "To hell with him, whoever he may be, up the stairs and down the stairs, and in my lady's chamber, and to hell with he."

The knocking, having been twice repeated, did not recur. Someone walked away.

McNaughton explained, "Blessed are the timid, for they shall be banished from my sight." Johnny Rue regarded him guiltily but forced himself to grin.

They sipped the wine silently, McNaughton lost in regret for having invited anyone, Johnny studying the pictures, the furnishings: this apartment held all the curiosity of a museum for him.

A new kind of tapping, quick and confident; and then Virgil Benthwick opened the door and entered, his hand on Terrence Collin's shoulder, his manner that of an elder brother, an encouraging brother. He was laughing, delighted. "Shame, McNaughton! Our boy was not admitted! I found him whimpering at the foot of the stairs—

so hurt he was about to rifle the delivery closet! What kind of hospitality d'you call it, not to let the lad in?"

But if Virgil thought it a joke, Terrence Collin regarded them unhappily—and might truly have been whimpering when found.

McNaughton and Johnny, both a little relieved, laughed. McNaughton told Johnny to go pour them wine, and this time he was obeyed. Virgil helped Terrence off with his jacket, burlesquing solicitude, yet teasing somehow with kindness. Terrence had had a bad time of it, no doubt of that, and continued looking at McNaughton a trifle uncertainly: he'd come, rather scared to come, for it was only his second time here, and he'd knocked, kept knocking, though he was rather scared to keep knocking—what if someone like his father came out from across the hall or someplace and shouted at him? and they'd been right in here, inside, laughing at him the whole time! Besides, who knew what might be happening to his painting in the delivery closet? He wished he hadn't panicked and left it there. Rue at least was smiling at him, friendly enough, but then Rue was colored.

Lightly, almost paternally, they went on badgering him, Virgil Benthwick claiming he looked "more like a Botticelli angel than ever (and I didn't think that was possible!) when he's weeping at the foot of stairs!" and McNaughton insisting no, Botticelli's angels were too imperfect, probably weren't genuine at all, and that instead Terrence looked more like Anatole France's descriptions of angels in *Revolt of the Angels*. Johnny Rue, when pressed for an opinion, said they were neither one right: Terrence, so far as he was concerned, looked "exactly like what they mean when they say, 'Art for Art's sake!'"

Everyone was quiet for a moment after that until both McNaughton and Virgil, staring at each other, said almost in one voice, quite seriously, "By God, I believe he's right!"

Terrence didn't really care who was right, so long as they were being friendly; he saw now they meant to be. He began to enjoy the wine, being so unfamiliar with it that things began to alter and take on new meaning with every few sips. He slid about in his imagination, as happy as a baby in its bath.

Johnny and Virgil started talking about the best (least expensive) places to buy art supplies: Johnny knew of an excellent fire sale

then going on; Virgil listened gravely as Johnny said what he had bought there with three dollars and fifty cents he'd found in the men's room at the bowling alley.

Not directly concerned, McNaughton listened to this conversation in slight amazement, stronger pleasure: his friend Virgil Benthwick had been born in England, and had lived there till he was twelve, and could even now not quite be said to have emigrated. He lived with his parents in an apartment more pretentious than the McNaughtons' but even more bitterly poverty-stricken, an apartment that was—McNaughton had been there often enough to know—an English cage of steel, and the sort of cage, moreover, in which "men's rooms" were never under any circumstances spoken of, and in which it would be inconceivable to suggest that even if one were starving, one might, with money found accidentally, do anything but make an exhaustive effort to return it to its proper owner. But Johnny told, as naturally as he'd hiccup, how quickly he'd slipped the money into his pocket, and how cleverly he'd pretended it had been a comb—and nothing about Virgil's attitude suggested censure. McNaughton realized his friend must, of course, be seeing it all from two different points of view and permitting Johnny, "so utterly without *our* particular disadvantages," as they sometimes put it to each other, such conduct as he'd never permit himself. Still, it made an interesting tableau: the elegant Benthwick, dressed flawlessly (for he worked Saturdays and vacations in a haberdashery and was paid, with no legality at all, in clothes), listening, with the urbanity of a duke's tutor, to this grimy little story. McNaughton admired him, admired him tremendously.

He came thunderously up the stairs, one of the last two guests; he came pounding the walls and shouting that he'd just swallowed rat poison. He clutched his stomach and told the echoing stairwell, "The pains! My God, *oh* my God, the *pains* have started!"

McNaughton ordered Virgil to lock the door, and Virgil had already risen, was indeed just by the door when George—George Morley III—flung it open and stood before them, panting hoarsely and clawing at his belly.

Terrence Collin was really frightened, and even Johnny Rue stared goggle-eyed. But Virgil Benthwick just suggested, "If you're dying, do it a bit more quietly, there's a good chap."

McNaughton somehow got the information through to George, above the croaking, that if he wanted any wine he'd have to quiet down, and if he quieted down, Johnny or somebody would probably get him some.

George collapsed, laughing at Terrence's frightened expression. He felt it no especial failure that neither McNaughton nor Virgil had been concerned: "You bastards wouldn't care. You wouldn't care if you saw me fall at your feet in convulsions."

"We ought?" Virgil asked. "Sorry. I hadn't realized." It was long established no one could make him so English as George could.

George then set up a kind of gross howling in imitation of Virgil's vowels. Terrence and Johnny laughed. McNaughton muttered half-distractedly, "Ululation, population, tintinnabulation, stipulation, copulation, death to you and Poe."

Nevertheless George was not pleased with his reception; he'd wanted McNaughton to be more upset about the noise, and some neighbor, a stuffy woman or a belligerent man, should have poked a head from around a door; some stranger should have believed for a long moment in his acting (Terrence wasn't much satisfaction: Terrence believed anything). Besides, things had gone wrong even earlier: when he'd driven to the Nixon house to pick up Robb—who lived less than a mile from him—Robb's single-track sister Betty had tried to interest him again: *Look, a living female!* Very obvious, very inviting; her eyes kept saying what her hips dared not. It would've been so simple, just to take her off. But what about Robb? After all, he was supposed to be picking up Robb! Annoying. Until she'd appeared, he'd *wanted* to come to McNaughton's. He subsided more or less suddenly then, into a sullen quiet.

Robb Nixon had entered noiselessly, indeed almost invisibly. He saw Terrence Collin sitting in the middle of the couch, with Johnny Rue at his left. Immediately he went to place himself at Terrence's right. Creating the tableau would be pleasure for him even if he himself couldn't see it: black Johnny Rue, then Terrence Collin so fantastically handsome, and then himself, Robb Nixon the albino. He chose this place, even if it meant facing the main light of the room, which meant, in turn, blinking.

George Morley yelled in sudden fury—from the middle of the floor where the last of his death agony had rolled him—that he was

hungry; or, to be precise: "Sweet Jesus Christ, isn't there anything in this hell-hole to eat?"

The tone of his demand was so honestly enraged that several of the others felt something like guilt to hear it. Virgil came close to the general feeling when he demanded sternly: "Hear! Hear! Our splendid powerful animal must have its food!" And answering himself, "At once, sir! At once!" Virgil then brought a tray of cookies from the kitchen, and a platter of raw turnips, and a bowl of apples; and he refilled the glasses. Their splendid powerful animal ate grandly.

The others watched him with varying curiosity. George was larger than life in his appetite for food; and in his wealth, for his father was said (though not by George) to be a millionaire; and in his size and vitality—his prone body seemed to belittle the floor, to reduce the polite room; and in his passion—for he was a smasher of windows and fountain pens, but a babbling worshiper of Goya and Rivera and John Sloan; and he was superbly athletic. They couldn't have endured him had he been able to paint better than they, but he couldn't paint quite so well.

They'd forgotten until now their obligation to smoke, but something about Morley's lust for eating reminded them. Virgil Benthwick was the first: he remembered his pipe and lighted it. He puffed slowly and seriously, in a way that comforted everyone, for not only was it unmistakably adult, it was old, a genuine grand old man's way of smoking. Still, he had no prospective imitators: it was generally felt that pipes were risky, for they could easily be too obvious. Pipes had better be left to the British. Cigarettes were passed round, accepted, lighted, and carefully attended to. It wasn't the easiest thing in the world to smoke a cigarette. Even Joinny Rue and Terrence Collin appreciated the fact properly—for if their leaders' intellectual poses were sometimes beyond them, they always imitated their physical mannerisms painstakingly and very well. So everyone's ashes grew quite long before being brushed off (and sometimes even fell accidentally); and everyone squinted an eye against his own smoke, and made a wry mouth and tilted his head from time to time, and muttered approximately one in every four sentences from around a dangling stub (though this also could easily be overdone). No one really enjoyed smoking for its own sake, but Robb Nixon was the

only one who actually detested it: it made his mouth seem filthy to his own taste. Robb smoked, when with them, not for fear of being ridiculed if he abstained, because his albinism had got him ridiculed past fear of ridicule as early as childhood, but because he loved them; if they underwent this trial, he thought he should too.

McNaughton, realizing he hadn't yet ordered Robb to do anything, told him to play some records on the phonograph. Robb chose, for a beginning, Ravel's "Bolero."

George Morley, washing down a bite of turnip with a gulp of wine, advised them to listen to it carefully and to imagine sexual intercourse going on as they listened. "That's the idea," he said, "of the rhythm."

They listened, Terrence as carefully reflective as anyone else, despite the fact that unlike anyone else he was still a virgin.

Finally, at exactly the moment Johnny laughed a kind of laugh he had once in a while, relaxed and soft as fur, Virgil exclaimed crisply, "But gentle Christ, it *is*!"

Robb and McNaughton nodded gravely. Terrence Collin couldn't let it go at that, however, and opened his mouth to exclaim something silly—but Robb took pity on him and tried to save him by asking if he'd like more wine. Terrence answered impatiently *yes!* and had his mouth almost set again when George Morley, still lying on the floor, saw the eagerness on his face and found the opportunity too good to miss. In a very serious tone of voice, George asked him a specific, coarsely worded question, and Terrence hesitated one second too long and then floundered into the wrong answer, an impossible answer. Everyone laughed for what seemed to him an infinite length of time, and Johnny Rue almost fell off the couch. His hand trembling with shame, Terrence picked up his glass and drank.

Robb Nixon was the first for mercy and told them a bawdy joke he'd heard a day or so before; he kept his expression the good comedian's deadpan. It was found amusing enough so that Terrence could at last lift his crimson face from his wineglass, though with no idea he should be grateful.

Some less descriptive music was played, causing George to become restless. He paced out to the kitchen where he investigated the refrigerator. What he found there shocked him profoundly: it was

Mrs. McNaughton's pitcher of lemonade. The pitcher was of the same crystal as the cookie platter and therefore constituted, he realized immediately, too damning a piece of evidence to go ignored. It would corrode his self-respect and his respect for McNaughton forever if he left it where it was and pretended he hadn't seen it. Making lemonade for them should have been forbidden the widow sternly; it was abominable. It reduced them all to fraternity boys, or even to sorority girls. She was a fool, of course, and McNaughton couldn't be blamed for that; but certainly he should have had her in better control.

He carried the pitcher out and set it on the floor and regarded his host heavily. "What's this, McNaughton?"

Virgil, that sort of Englishman who is loyal even under Turkish torture, slid out of his chair and crawled on hands and knees, like an elegant ape, to the pitcher. He uncovered it, sniffed carefully, and answered as only he knew how, all precision and superiority: "Urine, I'd say; with a twist of lemon peel."

If he lessened the disaster considerably, it was up to their host, still, either to shoot himself or to save himself. Languid, almost wilting with ennui, he rose for the first time in an hour. He approached the pitcher, picked it up with superb assurance and advanced with it to one of his mother's potted plants. "Right as rain, my boy. It's Mummie's own discovery; she doesn't tell just everyone. Not many; no, she doesn't." And he poured about a cupful on this plant, and another on that. The sacrifice was complete: he even imitated her, as he drenched them one after another; he imitated her, how solicitous she was with things. He murmured to the ferns, and dusted the leaves of the philodendron, and told the azalea it should "find the sun"; he assured them, in a cozy simper, that if this smelled bad they should remember it was good for them just the same.

He indulged in comedy very seldom: they found him excruciatingly funny now. Virgil Benthwick alone could not bear the disrespect. How much should she be punished, the stupid Mrs. McNaughton? He kept thinking: *But she gave birth to you, she made you alive!* And just when he began to feel shame for his friend, McNaughton sensed his thought, and the game stopped.

A Mrs. Johnston came to the door—McNaughton, since he was already up, answering her knock—and with words running on in-

corrigibly said she didn't want to bother him but look what she found in the apartment-house delivery closet when she'd gone to leave her laundry, did it belong to any of them? and by the way here was his mother's electric heating pad, she was returning it at *last*, and to tell his mother thanks very much, certainly did help, and were they having a party, well, wasn't that *nice*? would they like half a cake she happened to have left, it would go to waste otherwise? She was a woman of indefinite age, wore no make-up, and had apparently been eating something yellowish quite recently. While McNaughton took the things from her and shuddered a refusal of the cake, she kept trying to peer in at the group (he was a rare one, and his friends rarer still, she wouldn't be surprised); and he kept trying to block her view. At last, slightly nauseated by her ugliness and curiosity, he gave her in a voice like a moan, "The wrong of unshapely things is a wrong too great to be told," Mrs. Johnston. Thank you very much!" and shut the door on the horror of her. Then with his back to the door, he presented his friends a face completely tragic, and held the electric heating pad above his head; he could have been Salome guilty with her Baptist, or a waiter desperate with his tray.

"I think she saw me," Johnny muttered. "I held this magazine up, McNaughton, but she still could've seen my hand."

"Poor fool," McNaughton answered him, at last bringing down his arm and tossing the pad to the floor, "poor dark foolish fool, don't you know we care not? Care not, *care not*? And would bury her in sand, beating in the head when through?" Even Terrence understood what was meant, well enough to agree: "That's right. That's right, Rue." And Robb murmured the comfort: "We'll die together, Johnny. That's a promise." Virgil Benthwick inquired haughtily, "Why doesn't someone report the dreary bitch to the Health Department, anyway, McNaughton?" And George Morley demanded with surprise at least half-honest, "You guys really mean there'll be a row?"

No one answered him, but as McNaughton began to examine the other item Mrs. Johnston had brought—a painting everyone recognized immediately as Terrence's—he dropped for George's benefit the scornful observation, "How sheltered they are, the upper classes!"

They would not think of her a moment more; they destroyed her

in their minds. McNaughton placed the painting where it could be attacked from every side.

Terrence Collin felt fear and self-importance subdue everything else in the world, his world.

Everyone was quiet, staring.

After a few minutes, McNaughton began. "You will *not* do it! You will not *do* it!"

Respectful, complete silence: what was wrong?

"You *will not* show us if it's morning, noon, or *night*, Collin! You will not show whether they're sitting inside by a window or outside in the shadow of a tree!" He was so angry he forgot to be languid, an indication of profound interest.

The painting's subject was a poorly dressed young girl and an infant boy she held on her lap. She looked down at him lovingly, her self lost in him. He was edible flesh almost exclusively: an edible little bottom, succulent little bones, and besides that, he was merely something feeling safe, feeling warm; a baby of six months, perhaps, and his adorer not out of her teens. They were good, true, real; Robb Nixon had even let slip a little groan, because immediately their reality had seemed so real to him, so pathetic. George Morley had grunted indignantly at the same moment because he did not understand, could never understand, how anyone so foolish as Terrence could paint so well. The painting made Johnny think of colored women he'd seen with their babies, though he admitted there was more excuse for *them* to act that way: even Southerners agreed their babies were the cutest in the world. Virgil Benthwick alone related nothing personally: he wondered only if any theme in painting had been used one half so often as this of mother with son.

"You won't be bothered, will you, telling the time of day? You don't know *how* to, do you, Collin?" McNaughton was calmer but still a little angry: the painting was so good, why couldn't it be better?

Terrence pulled down one of his shirt sleeves; it was too short for him, had been too short for months. He looked at McNaughton and couldn't answer and pulled again, harder this time, and the material tore, because it was rotten with age. He stared at the tear in surprise.

Robb Nixon answered for him: "He isn't really so hot on light,

McNaughton, I admit. *Yet*. He probably will be some day. He's very good on mouths, though. I think he's—he's really amazing on mouths. Don't you think the mouth is good?"

McNaughton answered quietly, furiously. "We've told him, we've told our own dear boy a hundred thousand times he's fine with mouths. But what's he going to do, go on the rest of his life being fine with mouths and not be able to say if it's high noon or time for vespers?" (And where had *vespers* come from? It really didn't pay to be angry, ever; his father, the Reverend McNaughton, three years in his grave, was no farther away than that!) More slowly: "Does he even try? Does he even try, do you think, Nixon?"

Robb, like everyone else, looked at Terrence. Terrence seemed about to say something . . . then the impulse failed.

Robb asked sympathetically, "Where did you see them, Collin?"

"I saw them on the bus." He answered Robb slowly, ignoring the others. "They were sitting on a side seat on the bus, and I was just across. Across. So I just made about four lines: I didn't want her to say anything. And that night, at home, I finished the sketch. Then the next day at school—college, I mean—I painted it." Defiantly, but not yet facing McNaughton, just defiant enough to put up his chin and look straight at the painting: "I painted that in one afternoon. That whole thing, in one afternoon!"

It was too much for George: he hooted, imitated Terrence, sounded like a whimpering moronic baby. "That *whole* thing, in just *one* afternoon!" But only Johnny thought he was funny enough to laugh at. McNaughton and Robb and Virgil quelled the rudeness with chilly glances. Terrence felt his eyes grow moist, and kept his glance directed down for safety.

McNaughton went on more gently. "You didn't have time to notice everything, probably, Collin. And your figures, their expressions especially, don't leave much to be desired, I'll allow you that. But you know what I'd like to see you do sometime? Because you've got to try what you can't do, you know, *eventually*!"

Terrence felt much better now. He looked at Marion bravely. He would try, his expression said, he would try whatever McNaughton suggested. Robb Nixon, watching him, felt touched, and for some reason deeply protective.

"Paint me a wall, Collin. A patio wall. And I want to know by

looking at it whether it's an enclosed patio or an open one. And I want to know the time of day. And no people in it, no flowers, no shrubs. Just—a—staring—wall! Can you do that? Will you?"

"You mean— Just a wall?"

And this time when George laughed nearly everyone had to join him.

No one else had brought anything, or so it appeared. Denials from every side, when McNaughton asked.

Yet McNaughton and Virgil were both positive and Robb strongly suspected that Johnny Rue would have brought something. First he was asked politely; then prodded; then tormented. At first he denied—denied passionately; and then he extracted from his shirt a pen-and-ink sketch, rolled carefully in a glass tube, as long as a child's forearm. He was ashamed, and his shame was understandable.

Johnny had sketched his mother in the act of beating her grandson, his nephew Archic. She was standing, holding him by the shirt collar and flogging his bare legs with a rubber fly swatter. Her long skirts were billowing; her hair bushed out wildly. Her face was in an evil mood, ugly, its lines sharp. The little boy's face could not be seen, but his buckling knees and scrunched-in neck were eloquent. It was an excellent sketch. Johnny's embarrassment came only from contrast; Terrence's models were pleasant people and they were white.

No one paid his embarrassment the slightest notice, however. No more attention was paid it than young doctors, examining a rash, would have given its bearer. A line of the skirt was commended: "Terrific!" The little boy's legs: "Perfect! Perfect, Ruel!" And he'd shown where the lamp was, and he had most of the light coming from this lamp, properly. Nothing much to criticize. Robb Nixon gave, softly, very high praise indeed: "Damn you, damn you, Ruel!" Virgil Benthwick murmured: "Goya." George Morley stared, all lost in it, his face pleased and grudging. Terrence Collin said with conviction: "You did it that time, Rue." McNaughton warned, because he was moved, "Nevertheless, Norman Rockwell could have started this way."

But Johnny suffered a little, anyway: they didn't spend all their time beating on each other, really they didn't; and he hadn't meant to say they did.

Only a few minutes later, a quarrel sprang up—from nothing, from

not one sentence, just from the wine—between Virgil Benthwick and George Morley. They had had the quarrel before, and liked it because it made them both so bitter: left George hot with bitterness, and Virgil cold, cold as silver. Virgil liked to say that art had passed its peak, and tonight he said that not only art but civilization itself had passed its peak, and: "It's only not yet having run out of petrol that lets you go on *not* realizing we've passed it, Morley!"

In addition to this hated thesis, the word *petrol*—coming from someone almost nine years in this country—was enough to make George violently angry. He could not argue reasonably, so great was his anger. He shouted at Virgil that he was "an ass, an ass, a bloody English ass!"

Johnny Rue sat watching the quarrel, and his face twitched with anger at what Virgil had said.

Terrence hiccupped and giggled for the hiccup; then very carefully made his way to the bathroom. Robb changed his seat on the couch for another place, away from the bright light: by now his eyes were almost weeping.

McNaughton realized his guests were slightly drunk—and he could not bear them to be drunk. He told Robb to make some coffee, and he said to Johnny, "Come along, Rue. I want to show you something," because he knew Virgil wouldn't go on enraging George if there weren't an audience. He led the way out of the living room into a little hall, then past his mother's room and into his own.

Following, Johnny said politely, "Jesus Christ! To have a whole room to jus' yourself!"

McNaughton limped his way toward the wall space above his desk and flicked a finger to show what he meant to be seen.

Johnny, fairly gasping it: "They're—Rembrandts!"

Grinning, pleased: "I found 'em in a pawn shop."

The dark head faced him, the brown eyes flashing on their fields of white. Johnny's pleasure was electric, immediate to communicate itself: his teeth glistened, his smile was eager, illuminated. "Jesus!"

But McNaughton, appalled somehow by the animal vitality coming from him, found himself with this idea: civilization, far from having passed its peak, was an experiment not yet conducted quite wholeheartedly; Johnny's people told you something about your *own*, something you'd as soon not know. He began to feel a vague familiar

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embarrassment, a general knowledge of some unknown personal inadequacy. He squinted irritably at Rembrandt. "Oh, to be bankrupt in Amsterdam, and, oh, to be the syphilitic destroyer of your pretty little wife, but, *oh*, to etch like that!"

Suddenly he wanted to be with the others, and, turning, would have gone to join them; but, curious, with cups of coffee, they came trooping in at that moment, one after another. Introduced to the etchings, they paid McNaughton homage for his business acumen ("Eight-fifty," he told them when they asked, "but he wanted ten." "Shrewd bargaining, McNaughton," they praised him. "No bargaining to it: that's all I had"; but they praised him still), and of Rembrandt they spoke kindly too—first for his use of cross-hatching and then for his avoidance of cross-hatching. McNaughton begged them to go home.

They took it into their heads to be furious at that, insulted. They told him loudly they'd never been so bored in all their lives and would certainly not come again.

They all left together, and shouted going down the stairs. Without invitation, they piled themselves into George's car like drunken Russian aristocrats into a midnight sleigh. They felt healthy and violent, in the sudden crisp wind, and part of a fraternity superior to all other fraternities. They'd not have traded places with anyone on earth.

Terrence Collin was sick, but not till he'd reached his own bathroom.

Johnny Rue was taken home last, that arrangement being Morley's hard-boiled courtesy to him.

In the morning, when Johnny awoke, he felt quite wonderful—except for not being able to believe, completely, that the evening before had really occurred.

He lay on the living-room couch, his regular bed, and saw his little nephew Archie sleeping peacefully on what was *his* regular bed—two horsehair chairs pushed together—and he thought how amazing it was that everything, all the physical things like furniture and blankets, should look so exactly as they'd looked yesterday. He'd been to a white party, a completely white party, and it wasn't a Communist

party or a church party (he'd been to both those sorts and knew he'd been invited for his soul or his vote and they could go to hell), and now as a consequence he simply lay there, warm and happy in the blankets. He kept telling himself silently: *Think of that!* and he felt a bubble of laughter in his chest.

When McNaughton had invited him, he'd wondered if it might be some kind of social experiment. Maybe they were going to study him for their classes in Economics or Sociology or Psychology. Or else McNaughton was just wanting an idea for a poem. Or maybe they were Communists after all—though they certainly didn't seem like Communists. So for a while he'd thought he wouldn't go.

Not, of course, that it was so unheard of. He knew about plenty of colored who associated with whites without any axes to grind. Went to their houses—he'd heard plenty of colored tell about going to white houses on a strictly social basis. The only trouble was, when you came to ask *who?* and *when?* and *where?* and *why?* it usually seemed to turn out the whites had moved away now, or they'd wanted to sleep with both your girl and you, or really you'd just gone there to do the yard work and pretended. . . . Or else the whites who invited anybody were just real wet boozers or crooks, gambling crooks usually. Or they were cracked. Approximately two out of every five whites were cracked anyway.

But not that cracked. Not enough to ask a colored—

He rolled over.

So last night it had happened. It really wasn't made up at all. They'd always been friendly to him in the art classes; Virgil Benthwick had started it by coming up once when he'd been cleaning his brushes; he'd said he thought one of Johnny's charcoal sketches, on display that week, was "bloody fine." But then he'd just stood there, looking condescending . . . Johnny went hot with embarrassment, and scratched himself on the chest—because his heart had begun pounding with suspicion that day; Benthwick had always seemed to him to be trying to act so English, so damned superior, and wearing clothes that must have cost a fortune. At any rate, he'd felt a quick murderous rage because he was expected to care all his life what every white bastard thought, everyone took it as a matter of course he'd care, so he'd just more or less snarled at him asking what business it was of his. Surprising himself spitless. But then Virgil had flushed

and grinned and said something he didn't catch, and had walked off. He was just beginning to think that wasn't the brightest way in the world to have answered, when, the next thing he knew, a big bruiser had come up, a friend of the Englishman's. When Johnny saw his build, he could practically feel the fist on his jaw. Suddenly he was scared to the point of perspiring. He'd be able to hold his own for a while with the white boy, since he'd always been a pretty decent fighter, but sooner or later he'd be sure to go down: this kid was built. And you could tell by the way he walked that he knew how to handle himself. Why in Jesus' name hadn't he just said, "Thank you," to the Englishman? But anyway when the big guy came up he didn't seem mad at all. He'd just put out his hand and he'd said, in a very friendly way, "I'm George Morley. I already know your name, Johnny, and. . . ."

The sweetness of praise came back, as if it were new, right at the moment being said, and not just a memory.

They'd watched his work, George had told him; they'd been—well, *admiring* him all semester!

So, after a little bit, he and the Englishman and George had all gone to the cafeteria together and had ordered cokes. And pretty soon a sick-looking guy who limped came and sat down with them. And it turned out that this one, McNaughton, knew all about him, had been talking to the others about his work for months; he kept claiming to have "discovered" him, for Christ's sake! The little head Johnny had done of his father, wearing his railway porter's cap and looking very serious—McNaughton said that was the best thing in the university's whole fall showing, and nobody disagreed.

And then, one day weeks later, they'd all sketched him and the albino, the straight profile of Robb's face against a three-quarters of his, but the white face lower and to the left, Robb's nose at the level of his own throat. They'd done that sitting out under the trees. . . . And they'd eaten lunch under the trees at least a dozen times together since. They'd even gone to a show together, the six of them, one time. But to go to somebody's *house*!

He remembered how McNaughton had said, "Come along, Rue; I want to show you something," and had taken him right into the bedroom; *he* had gotten to see the Rembrandts first, not Benthwick, not Morley, but *him*, old black boy Johnny Ruel

And then, afterward, he thought they'd take him home the first and maybe all go to some white place for some more coffee; but he was the last, the very last one! . . . Just George and him, finally, in that big car!

He couldn't possibly have been happier.

He began earnestly trying not to feel flattered then. He tried to criticize them, to admit the worst and silliest things about each one to himself, although there really wasn't much use to it because he just kept feeling a sort of love for them over and over again. . . .

But when he saw his nephew's arm creep from under the covers, he recognized the situation at a glance: the kid had gone and caught that damned stuff again, Archie had the ringworm again! And he'd howl when they smacked him for it, and he'd howl when they cured him of it! Johnny sighed—this was today; last night was over—and got up.

He went to the kitchen, filled the big drum with water, put it on the stove, struck a match, lighted the fire. In a quarter-hour he'd carry the hot water to the bathtub and take a bath. Then Archie could take a bath in the same water, and then somebody'd have to pound him a while for playing with those dirty micks again (they'd told him a hundred *times* this was what came of it) and then they'd heat the olive oil and iodine, especially strong, and put it on with cotton; and then the howling, oh Lord, the howling! In the meantime, Johnny yawned and stretched . . .

After bathing, Johnny, feeling like a traitor, told his mother about Archie: he himself could never bear to give the kid a good enough hiding.

But Mrs. Rue could, and she did immediately. And indeed she seemed to enjoy doing it: her grandson Archie was illegitimate; she felt the disgrace of him keenly.

Johnny walked around the block. By the time he came back, there was just hard sobbing.

He applied the medicine himself though, for he could always make faces horrible enough and say things silly enough to have Archie laughing even while he was crying.

Afterward, they played their favorite game. Their apartment was a basement apartment, on a fairly busy street in Emeryville, a suburb

of Oakland, and from the window in the living room the legs of passers-by could be seen, while from the window in the dining room—because the slope of the street was sharp and the place had been built a thought at a time—their faces and shoulders could be seen. The game was to call out some guess about the passer-by from the living room and to have the person in the dining room tell whether the guess was right or not. You could say, "I bet it's a real tall white woman, and she'll be all slumped over, an' she wears glasses," or, "This the kind of bozo would have a flower in his buttonhole. Fat. Average height. Real mean expression on his puss?" If you didn't specify the race, it was taken for granted you meant colored, and you never played the game when the windows were open. Johnny liked to make the guesses, to be the one in the living room. Whenever Archie told him he was wrong, he'd rush to the dining room to see where he'd made a mistake. So far as he was concerned, it was better than a course in Anatomy for getting your structure right.

As they played today, Johnny felt a sweet ache of pleasure and longing; as soon as his father came home from the railroad station, he'd try to get him to go for a little walk. Quite often in the evening, his father walked with him to the bowling alley, and almost certainly would this afternoon if he especially asked. And he knew the thing would be good all over again, telling it to him. His father would ask, "That raht, man?" and would protest unbelievably, mock-scornfully, "Do tell, now!" And they'd both have to pretend a little, he knew ahead of time they'd have to, though he didn't much like it, pretend that it wasn't anything so great, that these white friends of his weren't so much: one with a limp and couldn't draw a box, one a real freak to make you sick, no color in his face, and then that baby Terrence Collin getting drunk on two-three glasses of wine! And to think of that stupid limey Virgil Benthwick (and here his contempt grew suddenly genuine) saying we'd passed the peak! Hell, the peak wasn't even in sight yet! Anyway, he'd have to say, or imply, all that; and his father would have to grimace and belittle and jeer. There wasn't any way around it, and what if it did—well, *hurt*, in a way, a little bit? There was still Morley's car, and there was still McNaughton's having him be the first to see the Rembrandts. . . . Johnny quite definitely decided, in a way secret even to himself, not

to look at his father's face when he told these parts: let his face be any way it wanted, if he liked it about the car or anything, nothing to be shamed for. He decided to skip telling about the white lady peering from the doorway: that was too ever'day.

Mrs. Rue called from the kitchen, "That all you got to do? Play games?"

Immediately Johnny agreed with her, felt guilty: he ought to be studying. He had Archie outside the door half a minute later, and got the notebook for the class he dreaded most: Economics.

His careful notes re-created every detail of the lecturer and recalled precisely every nuance of the cultured, acid, professorial voice. "The laboring man has, in the last analysis, only himself as bound in time and only his body as used in time, to offer as a commodity. Fruit will rot and bring its owner nothing if it isn't bought within a certain length of time, and just so, Class, is the laborer defenseless against time: he must sell whatever it is he has to sell (that is, whatever it is that he can *do*) without delay, for the simple reason that he can't go for long without eating, and neither can his children. The employer's money makes no such demands; it isn't much hurt by rest. We must grant, then, that time is not only the most perishable of all commodities, but that it also constitutes a factor inexorably unfavorable to the laboring classes. Therefore," inspecting his flawless manicure, "I think we need not seriously fear their so-called 'power.'"

O.K., everybody knew that much anyway, but not put like that. But you had to understand it put *any* way, though, and not be tricked: a test was coming Monday. Memory of George Morley interrupted his studying, for here on the margin was the note George had reached over and scribbled: *Malthus explaining why the factory kids had to die!*

And George had gone stamping out and slammed the door. He could get himself expelled someday.

Well, you could be as mad as you wanted. Facts were still facts, weren't they? He began memorizing the equation for the law of diminishing returns.

Then Archie, clamoring at the door, crying again. Johnny, answering the noise, inquired softly, "What the hell's wrong *now*?" and clouted him on the head protectively: Mrs. Rue might hear, she might see.

"Them dirty micks, they hit me, they threw things at me. They hit me on the chest with a *rock*, and it *hurts*—"

"Who said go play with those micks, anyway? You got that dirty disease from 'em in the *first* place! Why'n't you play with somebody else?"

"Johnny, who else—who else is around here *would* play with me? I just went over to *say* I *couldn't*!"

Johnny sighed, closed the door on him, got his own jacket, felt in the pocket to make sure of the nickel, and came out to join him.

"Ye shif'less skonk," he said condemningly. It was their favorite phrase, the funniest thing in the whole funny papers, and if it wouldn't made Archie laugh, the world had ended.

The world hadn't ended. Johnny strode along, ignoring him. Archie followed, happy as a dog.

When they reached the grocery store, Johnny let the clerk see right away here was someone who could tell the difference between a decent orange crate and something splintered or knot-holed. He looked the stock over and took his time about selection—nothing to be hurried about, it was a colored store. When he'd found the strongest orange crate there, he drew out his nickel and paid for it grandly, seeing Archie's eyes go big even without looking at him.

And walked away with the crate held carefully under his arm, Archie babbling, "You gonna make a kite? That what you gonna use it for? Hey, Johnny, we gonna make a kite?"

It didn't matter if the nickel you paid for something with was your only nickel or just one of a hundred thousand you had somewhere. You could take it out and use it the same way. And that was the way he'd done it, Johnny told himself. He could have a hundred thousand more at home, so far as anybody would have known to watch him. "Not gonna make kites with cry-babies, no, man, I'm not *about* to! Cry-babies howl over a little medicine, howl over a coupla smacks, howl over some little stone gittin' 'em. Cry-babies might get a splinter in their finger and cry, if they made kites. Might lose the kite on a telephone pole an' cry. No, man, I'm *not*!"

Archie begged God to strike him dead if he ever cried again. Shouting, he held up his hand and ordered God to strike him dead if he ever cried again.

For glue, they mixed flour and water in the kitchen. Enough good

twine was left from another nickel. There was a cache of newspapers under the couch, an advantage of Mr. Rue's job at the railroad station: always plenty of newspapers left around there.

When the kite was up, Archie watched it; and Johnny watched the clouds.

He'd tried to get Archie to do a little cloud-watching too, long ago. No success: Archie had thought it too babyish.

Maybe it was. At any rate, it was too silly to talk about. Yet, once, he'd happened to mention it to Terrence Collin. And Terrence had not only understood, he'd told about how before he could remember anything he could remember watching clouds. The colors, the lines, how the shapes changed—an old man with a footstool, look again and it's a dwarf at a table—and how one day he'd run home with the idea jumping around suddenly in his head that he could get them where he wanted them and keep them there for a little bit, the bears and the swans and the whales and the old men with beards and the sleeping fat babies and the thin castle towers and the terrible witches and the slow giants. Terrence said he'd run home panting, had climbed on a chair up to a cupboard and had gotten a bottle of ink, climbed with that up to the kitchen sink and had begun to make the things one at a time, a drop a time.

His mother had come in and slapped his face and called him a dirty sneaking little cheat.

"A cheat? Why a cheat, Collin?" Johnny had asked.

"I don't know. But for a long time I thought it was bad. Bad, like—well, like playing with yourself in front of little girls or setting the curtains on fire. I mean *really* bad. And in fact, it's a funny thing, Rue, sometimes I still get that feeling. Not sometimes: almost all the time. When I'm just going to start a picture. That it's, oh, I mean a *terrible* thing to do. You know?"

Johnny hadn't made fun of him, because it was almost like a rule or something not to make fun of Terrence, but he hadn't quite known what to think. He'd mentioned the matter later to McNaughton.

"Of course," McNaughton had murmured slowly, "of course, Rue. Creation presupposes destruction. Haven't you been aware of the guilt of that? And if creation is related to the sexual impulse, it's also a destruction of part of that, of the pleasure of procreation, because to the artist, creating his work is usually greater. The painter

approaches canvas, the sculptor stone, the poet paper, always, Rue, with much the same feeling a murderer must have, approaching his victim. An adulterer the embraces of his friend's wife. Of course."

As he had then, Johnny shivered slightly. They were often too—well, creepy or confusing or advanced, Benthwick and McNaughton and guys like that at U.C., much more confusing than the professors even. He began worrying about the test on Monday. And called Archie and told him firmly they had to get back to the house.

You could count the advantages of living in this house on your ear lobes and eyebrows and have a side left over; Terrence Collin would have told you that much quite frankly. But at least once in a while something was all right here that wouldn't go well elsewhere: he made as much noise as he needed to, being sick in the bathroom after the party, and felt safe about it. The cause of his sickness was drunkenness, and drunkenness was manly (both his father and his brother Bud—twenty-two years old—were sick with drunkenness occasionally), and therefore he knew it would be considered a good sign of development if he retched heartily, and heartily he consequently did.

Saturday morning they had fun with him, though, when they found out it was wine he'd drunk; maliciously, they advised him to drink quarts of water.

The effect they'd been hoping for came quickly: he was sick again, and this time helplessly, dreadful'y. He was scared, and tears came to his eyes, and his beautiful hands shook. Mr. Collin, a playful bricklayer, pushed open the bathroom door (it had no lock) and roared with laughter to see the act. But his good humor did nothing at all toward persuading Terrence he'd live.

Bud (a plasterer's apprentice, very promising) at last relented and put him to bed and gave him aspirin and a wet cold towel for his head, and even opened the window wide, though it was February. Their father protested at such softness—his repeated argument: "That's what's wrong with him *now!*" Yet Bud held firm: fun was fun, but enough was enough. •

At noon Bud went so far as to ask their mother if she'd make

Terrence some hot milk toast, and when she only looked at him blankly ("Kinda daft, aren't ya?"), he even considered making some himself. But decided against it: guys didn't do stuff like that, and, besides, enough of anything was enough. He joined his father in listening to a rebroadcast prize fight over the radio. Mrs. Collin sat near-by, contentedly reading a movie magazine.

Meanwhile, Terrence lay trembling, half asleep and half awake, between the dirty sheets (Mrs. Collin washed them only twice a month, because too much washing wore things out), and dreamed he was not there.

He'd never been there, not ever. He was Joseph of Egypt, Alexander the Great, the Prince of Wales.

Nothing that had ever happened to him in his life had happened to him. His mother had not taken to dosing herself with strong laxatives the first three days she knew she was pregnant with him, and his father—far from saying it all the time—had never once pointed out that this was the reason he'd turned out so different from the rest of them, so weak and all, so different. The stupid coy fourth-grade drawing teacher who'd written that note home to his parents: "It wouldn't surprise me a bit if you turn out to have an artist on your hands some day! Don't say I didn't warn you!" had never written anything like that at all. His father hadn't hit him that day and shouted, "If you think you're going to turn into some God damned sissy painter, you've got another think coming!" His parents hadn't played a game of saying they were going to leave him on streetcars, in theaters, lose him in crowds. Bud had said no, they wouldn't, that part was true, and putting his arms around him and all, but his parents had never played that game.

The note his teacher had written was actually a government order saying he was to be transported to the great waxed home of Mrs. Galmayer and was to be fed fruit and given baths every day, even then, though he was only in the fourth grade then. And he denied, dreaming between the dirty sheets, that he was poor, had always been poor, so poor it seemed impossible to be any poorer, and he denied he was terrified of Mrs. Galmayer and of anyone who was rich. Why should he be terrified? He was rich too.

He denied, dreaming hard, that the way he looked was at all unusual. Nobody'd ever stared at him on the street. In high school, his

nickname had *not* (even in sleep, his intestines writhed) been Cameo Collin! No girls had ever in his life whistled at him.

He dreamed he was brave as George. There was nothing on earth that he was afraid of. He couldn't even guess what it meant to be afraid. He certainly had no idea of what it meant to be afraid without knowing what he was afraid of.

Then at a certain moment his father and Bud urged their favorite loudly to fiercer power, and he awoke; or, if he were awake, he gave up dreaming. Fear of being in the house, his father's house, fear of his father, an immeasurable sickening fear of the fight on the radio, fear of himself—he wasn't anyone, he wasn't the ruler of Greece, he was someone there was no protection for if a fist were coming to hit him or a jeer to cut him—got him out of bed quickly and had him dressed within the count of five.

He went to the bathroom, washed his face. Tried to comb his hair, but the bathroom mirror was broken; went to the kitchen, combed in front of the mirror there.

If he could stop his hands from trembling, he could paint or sketch. Not here: never when his father was in the house. But at Robb Nixon's place: Robb could always pretty well be depended on to be friendly.

And Robb would probably feed him too. Suddenly the thought of food that wasn't prepared in this kitchen became almost overpowering. . . . Mrs. Nixon, a blond piece of ice, was apt to be out on Saturdays.

He went to the closet, slipped on Bud's jacket—Bud wouldn't mind, and his own clothes situation was really desperate.

Yet as he walked away from the house he'd just denied living in, he remembered with a new surge of fear the time he'd been told he'd have to get out of it.

Two years ago, 1932, just about this same season or a month earlier—yes, probably about a month earlier because their Christmas tree had still been standing, nobody bothering to take it down after New Year's. . . . "He oughta be gettin' out on his own now," his father had observed over the top of his newspaper one evening, calmly enough. "Do him good." He often looked straight at him while he talked about him, as if he weren't there, and he'd done it that night. "Been feedin' him long enough."

Bud put down his magazine to study Terrence also. Then, thoughtfully: "I think he should finish high school, Pop. I did. He makes good grades, and he's ahead of himself by a year: he's only sixteen. I think he's prob'ly got a high I.Q., even if it don't always show."

A pause in which Mr. Collin considered the aspect of education, remembered the Union was all in favor of education. Anyway, he liked Bud and always listened seriously to whatever he said. "When'll he finish?"

Both boys and their mother said, "June."

"O.K." He went back to the sports section of the newspaper—but lowered it and again looked at Terrence. "When'll he be seventeen?"

Mrs. Collin: "August."

The verdict, in a tone not unaware of generosity: "O.K. He can stay till August."

His mother had smiled at Terrence as if he'd triumphed somehow, and suggested he might join the Army or the Navy or the Marines then.

But from behind the newspaper, his father had grunted, "Not the Marines. Couldn't make the Marines." And after a moment he'd added, "No, nor not the Army neither."

An unbearable scene. An impossible scene. He imagined the torture of having someone like Virgil Benthwick even guess it had happened. He insisted to himself his family was the way the Benthwicks must be: aristocratic. His family really must not be the Collin family. He'd not have it. He especially wasn't related to his father.

Then in June, just as he was being graduated, just two months before his time at home was up, Mrs. Galmayer had rescued him.

His art teacher had found her, and described her to him: a lover of the arts, very wealthy, who liked to sponsor promising young men. Her latest protégé had fled ungratefully to become a Trappist monk, that was true, but Terrence could at least go to see her—she'd been prepared for him—and bring "whatever of his work" (Mrs. Galmayer's phrase) "he sees as most himself."

Trembling, he'd answered that he was too busy to go. His art teacher had merely driven him to within a block of the mansion and had taunted and threatened him into reaching the entrance by himself.

It was the first time he'd ever been inside the home of anyone who

wasn't poor. He'd kept thinking throughout the entire visit that at any moment he might wet his pants.

The things Mrs. Galmayer had said, and the rings she'd worn, and the way she'd kept flashing her lorgnette up and down and right and left! She'd begun by asking him, her face arch, her voice maternally coy, if he thought Art was Dead. Since he'd not the slightest idea of what she was talking about, he'd swallowed hard and licked his lips and muttered, defiantly yet placatingly, Yes, he *did* think Art was Dead. Then he'd stared at the floor, saving himself from her.

•Today, remembering, he groaned: she'd tinkled with laughter, she'd made the chandelier tinkle with laughter, and, "Ah, so young!" she'd said.

He'd had to raise his eyes and look at her then—to see if she were human. He'd not thought she was, and he saw that no, she wasn't. If anyone else he'd ever known were human, then no, Mrs. Galmayer was not. She probably didn't go to bed at night, for example; she probably just turned off in some way, and the diamonds in her rings turned off, and then in the morning everything was turned on again. He cringed to remember that he'd begun chewing his nails. He wished so intensely he hadn't made this error it amounted almost to wishing he'd never been born.

Because all that tinkling, mercifully stopped, had begun again. "Oh, you *darling*! You *darling* boy!"

He'd cleared his throat, so as to let her think he'd not heard what she'd just said.

Finally calmer, she'd asked him what he meant to *say* in his work, what he hoped to Do with his Life. Here he'd been so entirely helpless, since neither a no nor a yes could be used, he'd told her he wanted to join the Navy.

"Why, your teachers said you'd rather paint than eat!"

"Oh, no, ma'm, I'd rather eat."

And this time when the tinkling had begun again, he'd seen perhaps there was something to laugh about; perhaps he had even been witty. He'd smiled nervously.

"What a charming smile you have! You should smile more often!"

Earnest clearing of the throat, eyes to the floor.

Then Mrs. Galmayer had seen fit to explain what she could do for him. She could send him to an art school, or to Europe to study. She could give him a background entirely different from the one he

was heir to. She could outfit him so he'd look like a rich young man. Then with that maternal coyness: "And do you know what would happen to you if I did that?"

He hadn't known.

"You might very well become—*facile*!"

She'd dropped her voice at this last word, as if it were obscene. Terrence couldn't help assuming it was. He'd imagined it meant a combination of things: he'd get very fat, and almost right away he'd be at least thirty-five years old, with loose pouches of flesh all over his face; his eyes would be sunken, he'd drink a lot, and of course he'd be terribly pansy and mince around in a smock. He'd been completely horrified. Again, the nails to his mouth.

But when she'd asked him, earnestly, expectantly, "Do you want that? Is that what you want to Do with your Life?", he'd so desperately insisted no, no, oh *no*, that she'd hurried to reassure him: she'd no intention of exposing him to that danger.

Her magnanimity was to extend only to paying his fees at U.C., to buying whatever books and art supplies he'd need, and to providing transportation money; nothing more. That was absolutely all he could have done for him if he weren't to become—*facile*!

"You see, my notion is that I'd like to help you to become a spokesman for your class."

"Ma'm?"

"Yes! Yes, my dear boy! When an artist loosens his class-roots he soon becomes lost, a drifter, soulless. Oh, I've *seen* it happen—*often*!"

The stench of his father's feet, the sight of his mother's greasy aprons, the holes in the screen door—Mrs. Galmayer had guessed these things somehow, then, had she, and intended him to keep them, not to deny them? He'd blushed.

"You're to go on living with your family, as you do now. I want *them* to furnish you with bed and board. I don't want to alienate you, ever, now or ever, from your people. Remember that. Ever, *ever*! I should be doing you a disservice. And your art a disservice."

But if she really meant he could have paints and canvas and paper and erasers and easels and pencils and brushes and shelves of art books and could try oils for a change, God, try *oils*— Yes, if she really meant all that, why, yes, he'd be faithful to a bunch of cannibals if she liked cannibals. "Yes, ma'm."

They'd arranged for him to pay her a visit once a month and to

bring his work. Loving as a grandmother, she'd touched his sleeve. Then the final sting: in haste to be away from her, he'd slipped on the extravagantly waxed floor, gone down flat, flat, with his feet shooting out ahead of him, and had hurried to stand so quickly he might have been defying time to catch him in the act, but without seeing a little table— She'd caught the vase before it could topple over.

He would ask for something to eat the first thing, as soon as he got to Robb's. He'd stop thinking about stuff that had happened long ago with no way of being helped now, if he could get something to eat. It was being sick last night and then again this morning that made his mind go like this, jumping from one painful thing to another. His father had said the old gal was just wanting him to—well, that word his father always used for it, and then to kiss her ass when he was through, and of course he wouldn't give him board and room for that. "If she wants it bad enough, she'll cough up plenty."

"No, Dad, it isn't anything like what you're—"

"The God damned hell it ain't! Maybe not right off, but sooner or later. I know them crazy rich bitches."

But both Mrs. Collin and Bud had been impressed. With no coaxing necessary, Bud promised him his keep, and had paid it on the dot every month since, same as he paid his own.

Clothes were the only problem. And then last night when McNaughton had been bawling him out and everybody staring at him, he'd had to go and tear his sleeve like a fool, just for nothing.

Saturday morning the long, thin, pale, slightly trembling McNaughton hands were tender with the potted plants and ferns: what if they should die?

He begged them not to.

Remembering the many times he'd watched his mother tend them, wipe the leaves of this one with a damp cloth, or carry that one away from the radiator's heat, then test the moisture of their soil and so meticulously measure her gift of water to them, he felt desperately ashamed: what if they should die? She had little enough, certainly. It seemed she had nothing to love, almost nothing to feed—just these wretched potted plants; and last night he'd tricked them while they sat innocent-green and defenseless in her absence—he'd deliberately

poisoned them with sticky, sugared lemonade! He knew, couldn't help knowing, shame.

This one wanted the sun, a quarter hour a day, but these did not; he remembered the tastes of each now and catered to them apologetically. They were a symbol of that woman, whom certainly he did not hate enough to destroy, instead hated almost not at all—loved, perhaps loved, though the word, when used with a maternal connection, did leave him a little troubled, as if with faint nausea.

He tended them and aired the apartment—went limping from window to window—until the place was cold enough for shivering. He vacuumed and dusted and fluffed up pillows, all the while hoping this comfort-the-sick-and-bury-the-dead visit would suit his mother just right, make her sad for her uncle's death but resigned, and perhaps even make her glad to be alive, and would take her out of herself (she could be so damnably encased!) and so on. He tried to imagine that the party had been quiet and had lacked the sins of wine and cigarettes. He assured himself there'd been no loud swearing; and despised himself for being only twenty years old and for having had to listen for seventeen of them to ministerial commentary about vice and hell and the death that is sin.

It seemed impossible to him that last night he'd been surrounded by people who thought him important, who listened to him, who saw him as their leader. They were nothing, then, if they'd done that. Because he was nothing; he was a shadow.

He felt dirty and lost; he couldn't get from under the weight of guilt. The Blood of the Lamb might wash him clean, true, but even long ago, in the days of his faith, something about that sort of purification had made him slightly ill. He trembled, and suffered from diarrhea all morning and could eat no lunch. Atheistic descendant of a line of flagellists, he tormented himself more cruelly than any flagellist. By midafternoon, the apartment was scrupulously clean, and he was exhausted. He sat down and wrote a poem: with fashionable unintelligibility it described night, or perhaps the absence of day.

He read it over and over to himself; slipped into loving his voice and its union with the words. He sighed contentedly and fed himself with dreams of having become a greater Pound.

Robb Nixon was not at home, in the comfortable-looking, magnolia-bordered, three-bedroom house he happened to find uncomfortable, when Terrence Collin arrived with his wish to be fed. But Mrs. Nixon was, against her Saturday custom.

Plainly hostile, she eyed him through the screen door and did not suggest he come inside: she was a woman to worship conformity and middle-classness so ardently that the sight of Terrence invariably inflamed her like wickedest blasphemy—no one had a right to be so ridiculously handsome as he, and it was absurd for anyone to wear such broken shoes. If he couldn't afford to go to college, why did he go? If no one fed him at home, or if, as Robb said, "he prefers to eat at home as seldom as possible," why should he expect to be fed here? She understood his father to be a bricklayer, and that in itself struck her as a fact grossly without proportion, insulting. Her delicate blond skin reddened.

"He's employed on Saturdays now. You'll not find him home after this."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I'm sorry to have bothered you." Reminded by her glance that he needed a haircut, he comforted himself with thinking of the dime and several pennies he had put by toward one.

"That's quite all right. I'm used to being interrupted twenty times a day with peddlers and one sort of nuisance after another."

The dislike he felt coming through the screen door was so pronounced it purged him of hunger. He felt that he'd accidentally disturbed an adder. In order to get away without further speech, he bowed from the waist and made a sweeping gesture with his cap—he found just enough courage to burlesque her formality that far—and was off.

But she was not on speaking terms with satire; the gesture struck her as graceful, even poetic. As she watched him walk away, she found herself feeling almost troubled. At the street he stopped to pick up a magnolia blossom that had fallen, and she thought it an odd thing for a boy to do. He was supposed to be quite a painter, Robb said. And artists *were* like that, horribly poor and odd like that for a long while (thank heaven Robb was just going to teach it!) but then finally they were recognized and became all right, or as all right as people like that could ever be.

"Oh, halloo, there!" she called. And when he turned, she again

liked the gesture, a certain air he had, almost aristocratic—but no, he simply would not *do*! “I thought you might like to know where he’s working: perhaps *you* could find a job there too, since they took *him* on right away.” Certainly she was going out of her way to be kind, but if he ever did become anything he probably wouldn’t remember it, and he almost certainly never would become anything anyway, at least not before he died. Nevertheless: “It’s McCormick’s Jewelry Store. Near 11th and Washington. But I don’t suggest you use his name: he’s just new.” Might as well be plain.

Another one of those bows. Possibly he thought he was being *clever*, for goodness’ sake! Well, as she’d told Robb before and as she’d tell him again, *this* certainly wasn’t the kind of contact they’d hoped to see him make in college!

It was a fair walk to the jewelry store: Robb Nixon’s house was on Alcatraz Avenue where Oakland and Berkeley graciously meet, and McCormick’s squatted in the tawdry heart of Oakland. Nevertheless, arriving, Terrence again forgot his hunger, because when he found Robb and saw what they had him doing there, he blushed to his eyes.

They’d put Robb at a little stand close to the bracelet counter; he was engraving initials on dollar bracelets, on watches, on silverware, on rings. Well and good: Robb was a beautiful engraver. But McCormick’s was the largest and cheapest jewelry store in the whole Bay Area, and the dozen or so faces crowding around Robb’s stand were the faces of the proudly normal at a sideshow. A little boy kept insisting, “Look, Daddy!”

More than embarrassment or shame or anger, the emotion of terror caught Terrence: if this could be happening to Robb, who could say what might not happen to him?

Possibly the next thing would be for stores to begin undressing people for their customers! He himself might eventually become one of those poor devils that eggs were thrown at in carnivals! He eyed the crowd fearfully, and then looked again in Robb’s direction: *was* this possible? Didn’t Robb see that the crowd was just enjoying him for a freak, and not really watching his engraving at all? How could he endure such shame, such really unbearable shame?

As though withdrawing from a bad dream, Terrence began to

slink away. As it had that morning in its physical sickness, his body began trembling.

But Robb looked up at the last possible moment, his face immediately breaking into a broad smile. "Wait! Wait a second!"

Terrence stood his ground bravely. He returned the crowd's stares: yes, he knew the freak; yes, they were friends. His lungs felt suffocated.

Very soon, Robb stopped work, turned off his light, removed his eyeshade, and announced to his watchers—in a style Terrence found astonishingly chummy—that he was taking a break but would be back in ten minutes. He gave a signal with his head to show Terrence where to meet him.

Yet when they met, at the coffee counter, he was not—Terrence could not think he was really *quite*—Robb.

For one thing, he was too sure of himself. His pale pinkish eyes were gleaming, and they never gleamed. He clapped Terrence on the shoulder, and he'd never been one for such confident gestures. His voice sounded different: deeper, more melodious, happier.

"I've done it. Boy, God, I've done it now, Collin! From now on, I really have it whipped! Did you *see* me, how I was acting, and all?"

"Yeah. Yeah."

"You don't mean you don't *get* it, for Pete's sake?"

"Why, sure. I guess."

Chortling, with head thrown back: "Oh, Collin my boy, this is great! I feel *great*!"

"Y'mean to say you *new* it—was going to be like that?"

"No; not me. I'm a pessimist. I thought it was going to be ten times worse; roughly, ten to a hundred times." He took a little coffee, and seemed as happy as Utrillo on absinthe. "I thought it was going to be like something that happened once when I was—oh, just around seven or eight years old: what McNaughton would call my first significant trauma. Now listen and try to get it, Collin: it seemed to me that going through it now, voluntarily, when next month I'll be twenty-one, might make the old time—might help the old time. And instead, I think it cured it completely!"

Terrence glanced at his own hand upon the counter. How people endured being peculiar-looking he had never been able to understand. "What was it, the 'old time'?" he asked, his mouth slightly dry with the hopeless hope he wouldn't have to hear.

But Robb's explanation came out strong and quick, on a very flood

of this new self-confidence. "Just one of those silly pageants elementary schools are always putting on for parents in the evening; certainly you've been in 'em? Well, they'd got us all decked out in some cerise robes, cerise trimmed with saffron. God-awful. And we were all singing, you know how they do, up there on the stage, in praise of spring or the P.T.A., something sticky like that. So the point is they forgot to check the colored lights for the afternoon dress rehearsal." He shook his head, blew out a little whistle. "And that evening it turned out to be quite a blow, how I looked. They used blue lights; take my word for it: you put together blue lights and a cerise ground and an albino child with his mouth open, and what you've contrived, son, is the facsimile of *death*! Front row, too, because I was little and they didn't want to seem to be hiding me. It was like—I can remember: it was exactly like a *cough*, going through that audience! Some people even showed how sensitive they were by shuddering." He managed a reasonably genuine-sounding laugh. "'Spooky'; I was known as 'Spooky' until high school."

Terrence stirred his coffee. He'd found himself thinking how interesting a subject the scene would be for a caricature painting, and it seemed abominable to be so thinking. Still, he could almost *feel* himself trying. . . .

"So, Collin, what I did, a couple of weeks ago—I went to the manager here, a friendly shyster type named Mr. Maguire, and I said, scared as hell, 'People like to watch engraving.' He obviously got the idea right away, and he acted like I'd offered him a juicy deal in the slave trade. He told me, 'You'll go far in this world, young man, providing you don't end up in jail.' 'Jail? Why jail?' 'Because it's cynical. It's a cynical idea. . . .' I get fifty cents an hour for it, and he thinks I'm doing it for that. Let him think it. Collin, listen—I'll be able to teach now, *really* teach I mean, supposing I get a job. Nothing's going to keep getting in my way any more. You see it now?"

Terrence answered, "Sure, I do, Nixon. Course," in a tone that admitted lying. In the first place, for anyone to talk so enthusiastically about *teaching*!

Robb, slowly, perplexed: "God. I don't see why it should be so hard to get." But after a moment he changed his mind, and looked at Terrence with a grin. "No, naturally it would be. Adonis couldn't get that; he just couldn't begin to." Consulting his watch made him

rise hurriedly. "Stick around for a while, O.K.? And we'll have chow. I'm through at five. In the meantime, you could hop over and take a look at the Chrysler Exhibit."

"Where? At the Snow Museum?"

"No. At the Oakland. Got carfare?"

Terrence didn't answer.

"You have carfare?"

"I can walk."

"What a stupe!" Robb put the money on the counter. "So O.K.? You'll be back?"

When they met outside the store at five o'clock, Robb suggested they go to Lake Merritt, some half-a-dozen blocks away, and have dinner at the boathouse restaurant. Terrence protested: he said he thought they charged about sixty cents there, or possibly even more.

"Never mind that. Just this once it's all right. I did six hours today, so that'll be three dollars coming, and I've got a couple of bucks on me, and I think I've got about four more at home. So come on."

Then Terrence merely shrugged politely, "It's your money," because during the hours they'd been apart, he'd done enough thinking to be able to see that this would be a necessary celebration.

Their relationship had changed radically during the last few hours: Terrence had had to admit he could never have done such a difficult thing as Robb was doing. The automatic scorn-pity-tolerance he'd always felt for Robb—the same sort of thing he felt for the blind or the deaf or the crippled—was totally gone; he saw he'd have to have a new foundation, and he'd settled, in surprise, on respect. From childhood, he'd imagined that if he were ever crippled or grossly maimed, he'd immediately commit suicide, and he'd been proud of the idea. But this afternoon it had suddenly begun to seem a little childish, and his mind kept exploring itself for the strength to do otherwise. He'd found nothing. Throughout the meal, he glanced at Robb curiously, respectfully.

They discussed the Chrysler Exhibit in great detail and decided that what *they'd* have done with that much money would be something altogether different. They proceeded to correct, painstakingly,

all the errors of Mr. Chrysler's advisors. Too much of a hotchpotch, they said; too many old names included just because they were names—some of the weakest things they'd ever done; unforgivably weak, one or two. There should have been more of Seurat; and where was Dufy? Hadn't anybody so much as heard of Lautrec? And as for the lack of Whistler and Turner—words failed them.

But not a particle of dissension between themselves: Terrence found himself as quick to agree as if he were with McNaughton.

Later they rented a boat and rowed about on the little lake. It was too cold an evening for anyone but lovers and the homeless like themselves; they took turns rowing, glad for the warmth of it.

Whenever Robb held the oars, he tried to keep their boat a decent distance from the couples, but in Terrence's control such courtesy was forgotten: he was apt to stare in open fascination at the warmest embraces. And gradually they both succumbed to a mood of mild erotic longing.

"You ever been in love, Collin?"

"Me? Well— Yeah, I guess. Sort of. Once. No, really, twice."

Robb grinned, turning his face toward the shadows. "So? Give."

"Well— It was in my high school Chemistry class." His voice took on sudden enthusiasm. "She was the *prettiest* girl! Golly, she was pretty, Nixon!"

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. I used to do all her drawings for her—in fact I got better grades on her drawings than I even did on my own. But otherwise she wasn't so hot at Chemistry. I used to let her copy my test papers all the time."

"Did you go out with her?"

"Well, I— I never did really go out with her." After a moment he burst out, more than half-angry with the world, "So far as that's concerned—good grief! I never usually have enough money to go anywhere alone, let alone *take* anybody anywhere!"

"I know it. I know it, Collin."

"And nobody'll ever hire me! I'll bet I've applied for jobs a thousand times in my life!"

"The trouble is, you don't look the type to do much heavy stuff, lifting or carrying stuff, for one thing. And you don't have—" He found himself about to say "the right sort of clothes," but changed it to "the experience for other kinds of work."

"Yeah. That's the dumbest thing: how can you *get* experience if nobody'll hire you in the first place unless you already *have* experience?"

"They don't care. But what about this girl?"

"Oh, yeah. Well, that's— I mean there isn't—anything more."

"Oh. What about the second girl then?"

"The sec—? Oh, well, that was just the same, in a way, excepting it was at U.C. instead of High. Last year, in my History class. This girl— Geraldine Colter! Gee! I mean, I sat next to her. She looked *exactly* like Claudette Colbert. She kind of shot out electricity. She vibrated, or something. Like, if her hand was on the same book with your hand, even four or five inches apart, you could still feel how hot it was. I'm really telling you the truth: some days I could hardly *breathe*. And my heart would begin *pounding*, you know? every time she'd even *look* at me!"

Robb started to laugh, but cut himself off quickly, afraid of seeming cruel. "I've been there myself," he sighed. "It's rough."

"You have? Let me row a while now." His voice became as confidential as a plan for murder. "Hey, Nixon, did you ever— Did you ever— Have you ever—uh—"

Robb had to chuckle. "Have I ever gone all the way? *Ja, jawohl!* In fact, Collin, I seem to have had lots better luck than you. I'm not bragging or anything. You'd think it'd be just the opposite."

"Well, you're a couple of years older, too, don't forget."

"That's right, but— believe it or not, the first time I was only fifteen."

"Fifteen?"

"Fifteen." And after Terrence had clamored for details, he provided them, not reluctantly. "I was at Pismo Beach for a week, this summer it happened, with my family, see? and I was walking along the ocean, by myself, around midnight one night. And this gipsy came up—honest to God, now—earrings and a great big skirt and everything. I know it sounds like a dream, but I can't help it: this is just exactly how it really was."

"What'd she look like?"

"She was, oh, I s'pose in her twenties, and she wasn't pretty or good-looking, but she was—well, *beautiful*. The way a panther, for example, is beautiful. You know? But she didn't smell so good. But that didn't matter, or not too much anyway."

"Well, what'd she *do*?"

"She came up—no one else was around—and she just started acting enthusiastic as all hell. I thought she was nuts. I got sort of scared, I don't know, and for a second I just started to go back to the hotel."

"God, I wouldn't be scared! I wouldn't have gone back!"

"Well, I *told* you I was only fifteen! And don't forget, I said she didn't smell so good. Anyway, don't worry, I only *started* to go back. And then I thought: 'What the hell?'"

"Go on. What happened?"

"She took me to this trailer she had."

"Yeah?"

"Put your eyes back in your head. They scare me."

"Oh, come on, Nixon! What was it li— Oh, you know!"

"Well, nobody can say what it's *like*, for God's sakes, Collin. The only thing I can tell you is I agreed right away—almost right away, anyway—with what the rabbi told the priest."

"What'd the rabbi tell the priest?"

"It's a lot better than eating ham."

"Better than eating *ham*?"

"Oh God, Collin! Rabbis can't eat ham and priests can't—"

"Oh, I get it."

"Well, good. Real good. But the funny part is that afterwards she started thanking me all over the place—I'm not kidding—and saying it was awfully good luck to sleep with albinos, especially their first time. Isn't that something?"

"Why? Why would it be good luck to sleep with albinos?"

"Honest to God, Terrence, sometimes you ask the silliest questions any human being ever— How would I know why? I suppose they think it helps them read coffee grounds or something."

"Oh."

They became very quiet then, Terrence deeply enthralled with the gipsy, and Robb, weary of the present scene, remembering an intimacy two years before, the only time he'd ever been in love. Her name was Dorothy, the name he'd always thought most beautiful.

He sighed with the painful pleasure of remembering.

Even though they'd first met in pupil-teacher roles in one of the university's art classes, not more than half a dozen years lay between their ages, and some joyousness in her had reduced even those. . . .

Dorothy, Mrs. Dorothy Rossitier. . . . Certainly she couldn't have been called good-looking: her legs were thick, her skin was freckled, her forehead bulged out a trifle, and her nose and chin were ill at ease together, the chin receding, the nose strong. But if his eyes admitted so much to forgive her for, his ears had found nothing: her voice was probably the most thrilling he'd ever heard. Besides, what he'd loved her for were things to love behind a gargoyle's face or a monster's body: a generosity in her way of thinking, a gay sweetness or gentleness (yet gentleness not at all passive) of spirit.

• She'd invited him, once, twice, altogether for three weekends scattered through the academic year, to her mountain cabin; he'd learned tenderness from her like a lesson.

"You're my luxury, Robb, the only one I've got," she'd told him. "So if you ever feel poor and thin some awful day when it's winter all over the world, you just remember it: I, Robb Nixon, was at least one woman's only luxury. And she thought it was enough."

Nevertheless she'd steadfastly forbidden him to say he loved her, and wouldn't say she loved him; remembering these prohibitions now hurt him almost as much as remembering the loss of the woman herself. During that next summer, she'd become reconciled with her husband and had gone to live with him; she'd left Robb in such agony he could not even now bear to think of it.

He sighed morosely, stirred his shoulders; and pointed to a reflection of a fir tree, black on the silver water.

Terrence complained, "You ever try that? I'm telling you: you *can't* get that, Nixon!"

Robb nodded; but wondered—and at the same instant scorned his mind for wondering—why one would try; in a way, it seemed more than enough just to look at it.

His third affair he'd only just finished, quite without regret. He quarreled with himself about whether to mention it to Terrence.

His chivalry began to be weakened in equal measure by the facts that Terrence would listen so avidly and that she had been, in so many ways, so ghastly. For example, she used to refer to their love-making (but it wasn't *really* lovemaking!) alternately as "life experience," "just part of growing up," and "a chance on a blanket." Surely that was ghastly? And she never, literally never, washed her hair.

Before he'd quite given himself permission, it was blurted: "You

know that little Marxist fem, Collin? That dark little chicki who used to sit just in back of you in Anthropology?"

Then some details, losing their embarrassment in the unembarrassed telling: how they'd used the back of her father's pick-up truck nearly every evening for about six weeks, and how she'd kept lecturing during lulls, and, "She was always calling it 'healthful relations!' Honest to God, Collin, imagine anybody calling it 'healthful relations'! . . . And love was possessive emotionalism, and possessive emotionalism was nothing but regressive egotism. Boy! Not that it ever *occurred* to me to be in love with her. But I never could see why she couldn't just keep quiet about it, that we hadn't *made* it, sort of—that we weren't in love. The more she talked, the more you could see it was just sour grapes . . . Anyway, it doesn't matter now: last week the Friendly Family Finance Corporation came and picked up the pick-up." As he laughed, the entire affair struck him—it had before, for that matter—as pretty funny. In no way imaginable could it have been less important.

Terrence, seeing no joke: "You—aren't going to—date her any more?"

"No. I'm not. Not even if and when her father picks⁴ him up another pick-up." He saw her inviting him, and he heard himself say, "No. You never wash your hair."

Terrence stared, respectful to the point of awe.

Walking home, they encountered a couple of tipsy sailors who professed to be lost and who asked Terrence prolonged directions. He answered at length, with no idea at all, Robb saw, that they had more than directions in mind.

Once free of them, Robb put his hand on Terrence's shoulder and asked admonishingly, "Good God, Collin! Couldn't you tell those guys were queers? Golly Moscs, son, did you think they were *really* lost?"

Terrence flushed scarlet but was saved by the darkness. "Of course not," he answered fiercely. "Of course not! But what was I supposed to do, spit in their eye?"

He sheltered in silence, furiously ashamed; and when their ways parted, was still silent. How did one know these things? How did everyone but him always know things, do all sorts of things, have all kinds of things happen?

Walking alone then, he gradually left off wondering and began comforting himself with two ideas, first a lie and then a promise: that the gipsy had met *him*, not Robb; and that tomorrow he'd get himself that damned fir tree, he'd get the damned fir tree if it killed him, how it was tonight on the water, resting so tall and black on the thick silver.

Returning home, Robb was told that that big friend of his, Mrs. Nixon couldn't remember his name, but that great big fellow with the car, had dropped by and asked for him a while ago, and Betty had talked to him quite a while—did Betty *like* him, did Robb suppose? because really she herself couldn't see what there'd be to like about him, he was so sullen-acting—and they had ended by going out for a ride, they ought to be back soon now.

Almost immediately upon his entering the house, Robb's manner had changed: he'd become as quiet as pale. He listened silently, expressionlessly, to his mother's frustrated-sounding voice until she asked, "How's your job?" and then he answered expressionlessly, "Fine. It's just fine," and withdrew toward his own room. On the way, he passed his father's den, paused at the door to wave but not to smile, was waved at from above a stack of papers but not smiled at (Mr. Nixon was always solemn when he worked at night: credit manager for a lower-class department store, he'd attained such rank as to be able to approve up to five hundred dollars' worth of credit without consulting the mother plant in Dallas; he felt his responsibility), nodded the word "Evening," and received it back again: "Evening."

In his own room at last, Robb permitted his face to relax into expression. Without the slightest sound, he locked his door—but couldn't have explained why: neither his sister nor his parents would come in without knocking; and even after knocking, everyone would wait for him to call out or to open the door. Nevertheless, his firm habit, on the first instant of being alone, was to turn that key, and always just as soundlessly. Whatever his motive, he knew it wasn't fear: he had no more cause for fear than would have, say, a strong armed man stopping at a polite hotel.

His eyes had worked enough that day; they protested their fatigue. But his mind and his hands were eager to work, overruling his eyes.

His hands picked up and began to fondle a piece of wood, perhaps

half a cubic foot in size. . . . So Betty had gone riding with George? *You better be careful, Sis, if you don't mind my saying so.*

Then he had to add, for friendship, *But you better be careful too, Morley!*

In a moment, even his hands admitted it might be too much of a job to start on the wood tonight. He took out the melted soap: this was right; he started immediately. He began carving a head of Betty; if it turned out well, she'd have no trouble with George. Foolish, foolish: that had nothing to do with it!

As he carved, his eyes gave up complaining and saw precisely where the soap imprisoned her head. Whenever he closed his eyelids, his memory obediently presented her as last he'd seen her—in the act of pouring syrup on her breakfast pancakes. But she was vaguer in memory than where she waited in the medium, so he felt sure he could find her, bring her out easily. . . . *Wait, I'm coming. : . .*

"Wait, I'm coming!" He remembered how she'd kept calling that to him one afternoon about fifteen years ago, and how she'd run faster than he'd ever seen anybody run. She was only about seven years old, but when she'd arrived she'd laid about her like a fishwife in a fury: her schoolbooks were tied in a strap and she'd used them like the cutting end of a whip. The bully of the neighborhood, a boy taller than she, had been tormenting him, twisting his arm (for no particular reason, not even for his being an albino) behind his back. They saw her approach, but they both thought she'd be incapable of doing anything. "Ha!" he grinned now, remembering the villain's stunned and bloody retreat. And once, when she was twelve and he was ten, she'd thrown a vase against the wall and had gone to him and hugged him hard: they'd just overheard their parents softly telling guests how much the genealogies had cost after Robb was born. "At first we thought there might have been some mix-up at the hospital, you know? But it turned out I had a *true albino ancestor* on my side and Father had an albinoid *cousin* on his, just about three or four generations back! So of course he was definitely ours." And Betty, hugging him, had shouted to the living room: "Maybe he didn't want to be *yours*! Maybe he didn't even want to be *yours*, either!"

Two or three such moments, yes. Nevertheless, they'd never been fond of each other to that degree described as close: she was in effect

their parents' only child, and he'd never been magnanimous enough to forgive her that.

Yet on the other hand, while his father was always advising him that a good character and constant effort could overcome anything, just as his mother was always recommending that he try to act like anybody else, Betty had never once been guilty of such words, so of the three people in that house she was the only one he counted a friend. Therefore the head must turn out right: Robb knew how he went with girls, that George, and sometimes he went very, very fast indeed. His hands tried earnestly to persuade the soap.

But after several minutes' work it seemed to him he'd made her hair too fussy, and her ears too kittenish, and her nose too shrewd, so he melted the whole thing down.

Sleepiness attacked him, and, as he undressed, he saw her destiny, vaguely and unpleasantly: she was to go on, pouring the syrup on her breakfast pancakes, her attitude a little smug; and she could never be protected by him.

Mrs. McNaughton sat stiff and straight at the early Sunday morning breakfast table. The small pieces of toast she covered one at time with marmalade; spread the marmalade and ate the toast, spread another piece and ate it, so, taking smallish bites. From a cup of what she smilingly called the Sunday dishes (but what in point of fact *were* the Sunday dishes) she drank coffee. Cream was a luxury, afforded on Sundays; the sugar stirred, none wasted at the bottom. Both the quiet and sounds peculiar to a day of leisure flooded the apartment, came seeping in from the whole apartment house and the blocks around it. The sun, as if merely pretending to give off warmth and heat, made a gentle light at the windows.

Mrs. McNaughton sat stiff and straight. Yesterday morning Uncle William had died, not understanding who she was. During her absence, her only child had behaved inconceivably; she was grieved, and meant her grief to be known. Mrs. Johnston, down the hall, had told her a little, and then Mrs. Adams had corroborated the story. Now it seemed the manager and his wife were giving her odd looks on the stairs.

She had faced trouble of various kinds in her life, but never had she been given odd looks on the stairs.

She grieved silently, vociferously, all morning.

McNaughton knew she was waiting for him to confess. Even in his own mind, the party had assumed the aspect of an orgy. For some reason, he kept remembering the time, a year ago, when he'd spent two dollars in the immemorial way. His panic: if she really got him to babbling, how much would he let out?

His forehead perspired, the palms of his hands perspired; his thoughts, confused, assaulted his feelings roughly and came too quickly one upon the other: they might have been flung at him by a juggler. He assured himself there was nothing to feel such guilt for; admitted the truth of that, but felt other guilts from past time accumulating in him, vague and unpunished. He wanted no toast.

"Is anything the matter, Mother?"

For answer: only the quiet patient grieved expression.

A long pause.

"Do you think anything is the matter, Marion?" accompanying it with the same look that had made him tell her ten years ago that yes, it had indeed been he who'd written those vile couplets to sweet little Mary Louise, using dreadful words and disguising his handwriting.

"Well," he got it out, weak as milk, "your attitude seems to be a little—disapproving." When you were a grown man there was something essentially obscene about continuing to live with a woman who'd once fed you at her breast, he now saw.

"Does it?" She touched her mouth with the napkin. She had finished eating. "I wonder if you can think why."

"I suppose—someone told you we were noisy—that night." But had she fed him at her breast? The thought was unbearable; surely not. She'd never have been so animal! He must not think like this.

"Noisy?" She considered the word. "No, I don't believe anyone described you as . . . noisy."

A clock seemed to start ticking suddenly; to McNaughton's ears, it sounded loud with apprehension. It was an old clock and conveyed the disapproval of past generations.

Her voice hushed the clock. "Mrs. Adams—who felt she was coming down with the 'flu'—had taken a sleeping pill. But sometime after one o'clock in the morning she was roused from sleep. She said it sounded as if someone were kicking a steamer trunk down the

stairs. She got up—" Mrs. McNaughton's voice broke, "and opened her door just a crack to see what the trouble was. She said she saw you and your—acquaintances, I'll say acquaintances because they can't be real friends—coming down the stairs—"

A terrible silence.

"Yes?"

"Oh, Marion. . . ."

Some little spasm of nerves took place in his stomach.

"She heard somebody use the expression—the expression, 'God damn your eyes!' Quite casually."

McNaughton's own eyes were closed.

Gently: "Look at me."

And when he looked at her: "One of those boys—one of those boys was—a Negro?" And she really didn't believe it. "Marion, you didn't . . . invite . . . a Negro here? You didn't, did you, son?"

He had no voice, and no moisture in his mouth. He nodded.

"Well!" He had stolen a thousand dollars from the blind orphans' fund. Then he had used a United States' flag to wrap up his loot.

"I don't know what to say," she said.

"He's an exceptional man; I'm proud he's my friend. Christ knew no boundary lines, it seems to me I've heard that somewhere."

For the first time, open anger: "Talk to me about our Saviour Jesus Christ when you go to church again! In the meantime, answer this: Have you anything in particular against Mr. and Mrs. Silcock? Have you?"

The Silcocks, who owned the building, had given him tickets to the symphony a couple of times, and once, at Christmas, a book of poetry. He'd nothing against them; instead, he rather liked them. Confused, he stared at her.

"Did it occur to you that your little party may end by costing the Silcocks hundreds or perhaps even *several thousand dollars*?"

"Several thousand *dollars*?"

"I'm not exaggerating. In the first place, we have some Southerners here—for one, I know the Tribbles will certainly leave, if they get wind of it—and Mr. Hutchins from Texas, you know how *he* is. And incidentally, you know those two both happen to be tenants who pay their rent on time, with no excuses. And there are certainly others *not* from the South who feel the same way. And in the second place, I

understand the Silcocks have been trying to sell this building anyway. If word gets out that colored people come here— Oh, Marion! Their investment would be— And it's their whole lives' savings, everything they have, she told me that herself!"

"I'm sorry, I really am. I didn't think about all that."

"But you *did* know you were doing something wrong? Or at least something I'd be opposed to? You're only twenty, Marion. Your judgment simply isn't that of a man yet. I had no idea that the instant my back was turned you'd—" and her voice broke again.

He felt the moment cloud him, get into his spirit never to be scrubbed out: the oppressiveness of feminine superiority, the thrifty closeness of the air, the specialness of Sunday china, and those damned ferns—triumphant, in fact flourishing, on lemonade. All this would be part of his reasoning now: never do a thing Mother disapproves of, because if you do, it will inevitably mean the ruin of someone else, somebody rather decent like the Silcocks.

He looked at her bitterly; remembered she was going through the menopause and hated and pitied her all the more for that. "'Pray for us now and at the hour of our birth,'" he muttered, his face gone dark.

"Then, Mrs. Johnston said the manager was asking her if she happened to know anything about three wine bottles—three empty *quart* bottles—someone placed in the Reverend Stephen's back doorway during the night of your party. Because the Reverend was quite upset, naturally." Her glance said this part was just as inconceivable as the story about the Negro; he had only to say he knew nothing about empty wine bottles and she would gratefully, entirely believe him.

Instead of obliging, however, he rose and asked her, in a sober incredulous voice: "Retrace the masque of life, the section of universal chaos that was I?"

He made his way to the bathroom and took a little Cascara. Then he put on a coat, a scarf, a hat; and went limping from the apartment.

He carried his little burdens of guilt and defeat to the elegant Virgil Benthwick's no longer elegant dwelling. It wasn't far. It was just the distance from the Rose-Grove section of Berkeley to the

Thousand Oaks section, the distance from a schoolteacher's apartment to—for example—a college professor's mortgaged house.

The Benthwicks—father, mother, and only child—resided in the lower half of a duplex in a block made up rather more of single dwellings than of duplexes. From the year 1926, when they'd arrived in this country from England, until perhaps five years later, they'd leased their half (two bedrooms, a tiny den, a small protected yard; but the boy was after all in boarding school) for seventy dollars a month. Living exclusively on their investments in stocks and bonds, and traditionally unfitted for gainful employment of any sort, they found themselves unable to afford such rent by 1931; and their wealthy landlord, deeply impressed by Mr. Benthwick's conviction of genuine superiority, obligingly cut it by one-third. (By then Virgil was a freshman at the University of California; not, as had been hoped, at Harvard.) In 1933 the landlord, no longer rich, tried to commit suicide with the help of a revolver and came so close to succeeding that forever afterward his left arm was completely useless, his left leg nearly so, and his brain unpredictable: there were whole days, for example, when he thought he was a bat, and other days of almost steady weeping for the reason of his secret knowledge—that trees suffered horribly at being cut and wood endured unspeakable agony when burned. (The doctors said he'd die; he was supposed to die.) •

The landlady, exasperated, for she'd thought she was done with it, went back to earning her bread by writing cowboy stories for pulp magazines; and she proposed that Mrs. Benthwick come every day to her home to look after the wood-loving bat. ("Forget the rent, Mrs. B.," she said—as indeed by now the Benthwicks almost had to—and she promised to arrange whatever else she could.) A great deal was expected of one sometimes in life, the landlady felt; and so she said, pitying herself furiously; and Mrs. Benthwick agreed in unaffected sympathy, as did everyone else. But because after a while the landlady turned out to be rather generous to the Benthwicks, arranging more than had been expected, and because in truth she'd been more bored not writing her cowboy stories than she'd been writing them, and because it was only Mrs. Benthwick anyway, a

modest uncomplaining woman who had to endure the constant genuine horror of the bat, the cloud of this particular suicide attempt had, after all, many silver linings.

It occurred to Marion McNaughton, as he came up the steps, that the duplex needed painting, though he understood quite well the extreme unlikelihood of its being painted soon. He noticed that the steps were well swept, as always, and the windows washed.

He rapped gently. One never rang the bell or knocked in ordinary fashion here: Mr. Benthwick might be resting.

Virgil opened to him and warned in a voice so soft it was more quiet than a whisper: "Enter. The Sire dines."

McNaughton intended to proceed directly to the tiny den that constituted Virgil's bedroom and studio, but then he saw Mr. Benthwick motioning to him from where he sat at the dining table.

The old man expected immediate response and received it. So imperious was his manner of gesturing and so majestic his bearing that he was invariably obeyed.

Quite forgetting to be deliberate, McNaughton limped over the thin, immaculate rugs of the darkened living room and entered the dining room: a small solemn place, a mass of dark beautiful wood, much shining glass, and yards of old lace delicate and fresh but slightly yellowed with age. He felt his own spirit shrink, becoming humbler.

The Sire sat alone at table. He was perhaps sixty-five years old, with a short and precisely pointed beard, eyes of a startlingly icy blue, and skin as transparent and protected as a baby's. His bones were fine and light; all of them perfectly in harmony of proportion. His hands were the most exquisite and useless looking McNaughton had ever seen.

Mr. Benthwick indicated with one of these hands that he should sit down, and then inquired—in a way that implied the answer should certainly be no—as to whether he'd care for a glass of tomato juice.

McNaughton declined, but his tone made it clear he understood himself to have been offered some splendid thing for which he was not worthy. Nor did there exist much irony in his thoughts: as always, the old man simply hypnotized him; already, the expected vibrations of genuine hauteur had reached and conquered him. He

sat fairly erect in the dark comfortless dining chair and knew without looking in his direction that Virgil stood by uncertainly. McNaughton wondered with him whether he should sit down without having been directed to—since, apparently, he wasn't sharing this meal but was merely serving it. McNaughton advised him inaudibly, invisibly, to go have a look at the tea.

But Virgil heard nothing. And saw nothing but the scene as it wanted to be painted: *The Sire Dines*. Oils, it should be in oils, and on a grand scale, five feet by seven, at least. He knew himself to be capable of such a work, and burned with frustration for that very reason: it would make no sense at all to the moneyholders, who'd find it anachronistic. "What are the boys so afraid of?" they'd ask, and "Who is the old fellow? If the clothes were Victorian, I could understand it. No, I think they should be medieval. . . ." No one would come close to buying it. Temperamentally incapable of Cubism and abstractions, Virgil forgot his manners and gave out a gentle sigh.

His father glanced at him, a brief, scathing, vivisectionist sort of glance: and immediately Virgil became a footman, not too bright. He hurried to the kitchen.

"I came across this thought the other day," the Sire said to McNaughton, "and before I knew what had happened, I found it'd led me to rather a shocking conclusion." He drew from his pocket a card on which he'd copied in minute and beautiful script a quotation from a philosophical article. He handed the card to McNaughton; then sipped tomato juice, having first salted it so meticulously it could be assumed the useless-looking hands knew to the grain the exact amount wanted—and sipped again. He watched the young man read:

Socrates taught that all wrong-doing is involuntary. According to Socratic principles, no one ever wishes for anything but true good, that is true happiness, but men miss their happiness in spite of the universal wish for it, because they do not know what it is. They mistake for good those things which are not really good. The goal Socrates set his students was to attain the knowledge of good which would prevent them from using strength, health, wealth, opportunity wrongly. If a man has this knowledge, he will always act on it, since to do otherwise would be to prefer known misery to known happiness, and this is impossible. In

Socrates' mind, all the virtues were one thing: knowledge of good; and all vice one thing: ignorance of true good.

McNaughton tried with all his intellectual power not to be misled by the simplicity of the common words he read. He tried harder than he'd ever tried in college examinations; to be less than astute with the Sire was to be brought to the status of a dull child, and utterly to humiliate his friend Virgil. The long hands did not shake, for he held the card on the table.

He smiled, to show he wasn't nervous. "And your shocking conclusion, sir?"

"The shocking conclusion—the sort of thing I'd have supposed one should be hanged for—is that when you finish pounding poor Socrates to his essence (and that's exactly what this meat-grinder sort of fellow did," he motioned toward the card, "for you can't say he really misinterpreted anything, he just ground it to baby food), what you've got left is horrifyingly like what that demented female creature kept insisting on; y'know whom I mean? Mary Baker Eddy, of course!"

His thin lips may have smiled behind their covering of beard. For several moments the gaze of icy blueness held, in a sort of vise, McNaughton's large, dark, sorrowful eyes.

McNaughton managed, "That is shocking." But he was not supposed to have understood as yet; was consequently ignored. Virgil entered with the tea.

"She uses the word Truth—as well as God and Life and Love and I don't know what all—interchangeably with Good, and of course that's got to be taken into account, but still it seems to me her nonsense comes astoundingly close to Socrates' wisdom." He sampled the tea; was obviously and immediately displeased.

McNaughton hurried therefore: "Sir, couldn't Jesus Christ be considered a kind of intermediary? 'Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free'? Wouldn't that be some sort of step between?"

But the Sire was not to be prevented from reprimand. "This tea has steeped at least seven minutes." His tone was expressionless; the eyes of ice fastened on a point in midair.

"Not more than six, I think, sir." Yet the tone was not certain;

Virgil's voice, usually so clipped and certain, held shame and apology now.

A pause, heavy with embarrassment.

"I wonder in what way it might possibly be impressed on you—that *tea ought properly to steep five minutes?*"

Silence. And McNaughton could not bear it: it was like a flogging. He interposed. "My fault. I came at the wrong moment." He was completely ignored.

"It seems so simple. Yet it must not be simple, apparently: one might otherwise think you a fairly intelligent young man. The difference between five and seven minutes. Between the way tea ought properly to be, and the way it is unpalatable."

Blood did not spill on the floor but it rushed to Virgil's face. "I'm sorry, sir. I'll make you another pot."

"Do you think you could?" His tone seemed kindly, encouraging. "Perhaps you'd find my watch less distracting than the kitchen clock? Here: take my watch and try again." He unfastened a little silver watch from an inner pocket and handed it to his son, a half-wit and dumb.

Virgil took the watch and the teapot and left for the kitchen. McNaughton thought that although they'd been alike, it was unfair to his dead father to compare him wholly to this Englishman. The Reverend would have drawn the line at the watch trick, that was certain.

But he did not wish to be forbidden to come to Virgil's place. With what he hoped was boyish ingenuousness, he smiled at the fastidious anachronism. "It's interesting to contrast all that light-and-dark type of thinking with the Hindu idea, isn't it, sir? You know: 'If the red slayer think he slays, Or if the slain think he is slain—?'"

The Sire was pleased, partly to be able to continue the quotation: "They know not well the subtle ways I keep, and pass, and turn again. . . . Shadow and sunlight are the same . . . And one to me are shame and fame. . . ." He smiled, almost beamed, with admiration: "I didn't know there was a student of Emerson left among the young people in this country!"

McNaughton fought valiantly against a feeling of pleasure.

Then they played about with Indian philosophy for a while. They

ended by supposing themselves, with little smiles, to be, as much as anything, pantheists. The second pot of tea was palatable, apparently.

When at last they were in Virgil's tiny bedroom-studio, McNaughton experienced a sensation of confusion and self-doubt not unfamiliar to him in this setting. He felt many things at once: felt that he had betrayed Virgil by making no protest when Mr. Benthwick treated him like a feeble-minded servant; but felt that on being accepted as fit for conversation with the Sire he had somehow raised Virgil's prestige; felt humiliated to have been flattered by the praise; and understood his own personal weakness to be undeniable. He mock-assured himself he was not Prince Hamlet but an attendant lord, an easy tool, deferential, glad to be of use; and he longed rather passionately to be someone else for a change, or not to be at all.

"That pompous bastard!" he burst out to Virgil, knowing that to say such a thing was wrong and would not be tolerated.

Virgil slumped to the floor and leaned his head against a long chintz-covered piece of furniture described as a day bed. He gave a wan smile and muttered, as superior in tone as if he spoke to a child, "Oh, take it light, old chap!"

They sat in silence, in attitudes of dejection, not looking at one another, for perhaps half a minute. They had both stopped wondering long ago, years ago, why it was that Virgil permitted such tyranny—and permitted it not only without rebellion, but without even protest. The things they liked least about themselves began crowding around them and threatening to take over the entire room.

But suddenly Virgil became animated, smiled in a secret way, went to a corner cupboard, unlocked it, and drew out a Chinese scroll. There was something definitely secretive in his manner, yet his eyes were shining with pleasure. He untied the makimono's strings, told McNaughton to sit over by the window, then stationed himself several feet away and began to unroll the treasure, holding it all the while at the level of his chest. His movements were slow and tender. Some of his excitement carried over to McNaughton, whose breathing altered slightly now, as if he felt one must be careful, here, not to breathe too hard. When some eight inches of the silk had been unrolled, Virgil held it still, to be seen: mountains were revealed, and trees, and the suggestion of a stream; the brushstrokes were

graceful and gentle and managed to hint rather than to state what they would have the viewer know. Virgil studied McNaughton's reaction—with great pride, as if he himself were the artist; and McNaughton was utterly intent.

"Now, look at this," and he unrolled the painting farther: another eight inches. Foothills appeared now as well as a little dark forest, and more of the artist's magic with space became clear: the painting wasn't much beyond one foot tall, and only—so far—about sixteen inches wide, but it held a whole day's walking in open country and gave certain knowledge of the air's crisp purity. There were no birds in the painting, but only a deaf man could have missed their song. No human figures, yet the viewer himself walked into the landscape.

McNaughton's face grew a foolish expression, for once completely without self-consciousness: the picture was beginning to make him feel happy, almost elated. But at the same time the work seemed to hold a wistfulness, a longing, some small sadness; he knew as much, and admitted knowing it, against his pleasure.

Virgil again: "Now look—look, McNaughton." And unrolled the makimono to its full extent. What happened was like a shock. On the instant that the whole was seen, there was no imagining having been satisfied with the parts. One new tree showed itself so real and dark it was at once like fur and like jet; it stood so near it asked to be touched, and the breezes alive in it could almost be felt on one's cheek. At the same time even further distances were disclosed in the background: the artist had been showing area enough for a journey, not a day's walk. And the trifling disappointment, that little sadness—they were altogether gone. There was only peace, a feeling of completion. It was indeed a work of art; it seemed to McNaughton simply perfect.

Virgil held the painting still until his arms ached; then began to roll it up. Neither he nor McNaughton spoke for a minute or two. Finally, the soft, rather awed, complaint: "I wasn't finished, Benthwick."

Triumphant: "One never is, old man. That's the point." He explained: such a work was known as a hand-scroll and was meant to be held in the hands, was never to be put on the wall and left there. "So it can't conceivably become part of the furniture, y'know?"

"Great God, what a marvelous idea!"

"It really is a marvelous idea, isn't it?"

"Is it the Jew's?"

"Yes. He wanted me to keep it—for a week or so."

And a little uncomfortableness. A stupid question, they both felt, to have asked. Virgil had somehow met a Jewish art merchant who occasionally let him keep a painting for a week or so, but for some reason asked that the matter be kept secret. Only to McNaughton was he betrayed, but there was a little uncomfortableness even in that.

Because McNaughton had never before seen such a thing and because Virgil himself possessed it so briefly, they took turns holding it for each other, carefully, almost reverently, using scraps of soft cloth so as not to dampen the silk. The more they studied the painting, the more amazed they became that the artist had achieved balance in it at three different points; the sensation they'd felt on first seeing the total work continued to repeat itself.

Once they thought they heard the Sire approaching—and quickly, silently set about hiding the makimono.

But he'd merely gone to another room: it wasn't his habit, anyway, to visit Virgil's.

Nevertheless, the footsteps had made McNaughton uneasy. He was uncertain whether he should say it or not but put the question anyway: "If the old boy's finished, hadn't you better clear away the dishes and so on?"

He was answered with a grin. "It's all right: I expect we'll want to be napping for a bit now. We've had a nice dinner, y'know—and quite a satisfying little tantrum."

Some fondness here for the tyrant—in the tone, in the expression "we"—brought the slightest aversion to McNaughton against him. The word *masochist*, trying to swim up . . . And then a twinge of nausea.

Politely, Virgil offered evasion of the insoluble: again he displayed the scroll.

Later they went walking. They wanted to see Greta Garbo in *Queen Christina* but would require a dollar between them for that (including streetcar fare) and could raise only forty-five cents. They walked slowly, both of them thinking and saying nothing at all of

the wine and cigarettes consumed at the party and of the Rembrandts hanging on the wall. McNaughton's birthday present, a ten-dollar bill given by his godmother in October, was gone (a fact they acknowledged gravely, silently), and Dr. Etienne, Professor of English Literature, would certainly not be paying him anything for February's work until at least the fifth of March; and as for Virgil, it was simply extraordinary for him to have as much as he had right now, thirty cents.

Virgil sometimes affected McNaughton's habit of disconnected utterances, and now he mumbled, as if out of context, "Four months more, old chap. . . ." Yet he could never succeed in puzzling, for his mind was too orderly. McNaughton knew immediately what he meant: that within four months he'd be graduated, might perhaps be able to find a teaching job. McNaughton answered only with a glance, and four words in a distant voice: "Thou cruelest fool, Optimism." They walked on, thinking somberly. Even if he were to find a job and earn some money for once, he should certainly have to use it for rescuing his mother from the nightmare of the bat, shouldn't he? And then immediately the same horror occurred to them, to both at once: what if, while still so needed, the bat should die? The Benthwicks had already sold and pawned and redeemed, pawned and forfeited. If the bat should thoughtlessly, pointlessly die on them some dawn—

A headline threatened from a newsstand that Russia and Japan would be at war soon. Suddenly it was a little too much for Virgil. He threw back his head and laughed. In a suddenly expansive, utterly uncharacteristic gesture, he clapped McNaughton on the shoulder, threw back his head and roared. By way of explanation, he pointed at the newsstand as if at something wonderfully amusing.

To show he disapproved of this outburst, McNaughton paid it not the slightest attention. It subsided. They went along as before. Then as if driven into cheerfulness, McNaughton muttered—carelessly—that the Federal Government was going to begin paying its employes what they'd been making before the depression cuts, did Benthwick know that? Virgil shook his head but added he didn't know any Federal employes, did McNaughton? McNaughton shook his head.

Partly because of the limp, partly because their conception of

proper conduct demanded that they appear completely unhurried, they walked very slowly; so slowly indeed they were painfully cold. Therefore, without much more than a glance to discuss it, they entered a drugstore and sat at the fountain and ordered coffee.

Clerking at the magazine and tobacco counters was a girl about their age and so pretty that McNaughton stared entranced; Virgil, more discreet, examined covertly. And she was too busy, sorting boxes and straightening displays, to notice them. McNaughton finished his coffee, muttered, "Your treat," and walked slowly over to her. Silently, he purchased a magazine that cost a nickel and, still silent, thanked her for her attention with a bow and a grave, sad smile. His eyes became deliberately tragic; his face went hungry.

It could be seen at once that she was a kind girl and that she thought him involved in some recent or current disaster; she returned his smile in a way that said she wished him well—and hoped his trouble would pass.

Then, with all the timidity of a Charlie Chaplin urchin, McNaughton drew from his pocket a pencil and a writing pad. In writing, he begged her to excuse him, but he was looking for work, was the manager in? No? When would be the best time to apply? She began to answer him in speech, but he smiled helplessly, shook his head apologetically, proffered the pad.

At once her whole manner—eyes, mouth, even the set of her shoulders—assured him that whatever protection she could give was his; she hurried to write her answers but was careful to make them legible; her eyes tried very earnestly to conceal her pity; her mouth smiled to say she thought it nothing at all, indeed almost attractive, to be deaf and mute. Even the scent of her young body carried itself to him, gentle and sweet, as if to assure him she was not among the predatory ones of the world.

They corresponded for a few minutes, and so intense a pleasure it was to watch her earnestly writing, just a couple of inches from his elbow and so entirely warm and good, that the episode provided a little ecstasy for him. But he had the sense not to overdo it, all the same. He bowed again; and left.

They met outside, Virgil quizzical but grinning: "Well?"

Smiling, McNaughton told him what he'd done, saying that the idea had just occurred to him.

"But you can't very well see her again?"

"I s'pose not. But in a way I got to know her—to be more *intime*, y'know—than I could have in two or three dates."

"Right. But all the same—"

"Oh Christ, Benthwick. What does that matter? This was— This was like going to bed with a virgin," McNaughton answered, still happy and warm. But in honesty added, "I imagine."

Later it occurred to them their mothers might be persuaded to want to see *Queen Christina* and might consequently pay their way. They decided to go home and try. "She feeds the soul, Garbo does, and the soul must be fed at any price, Benthwick. Even at the price of an occasional try for dutiful sonhood. Conformity, even that."

"Alas."

"Alas, my friend." And, after a moment's thought:

"Mine eyes shall know the wonder of her face,

"Mine ears the splendor of her voice,

"Till Heaven shall erase

transform

dissolve

"Me into matter without choice."

Robb Nixon was wrong.

There actually was something very kittenish about his sister Betty's ears, and about her eyes—grayish and wide-set as well.

Her boss, Mr. Trotter, top personnel man in one of San Francisco's proudest department stores, had often noticed this quality: and he'd requested, indeed had been granted several dates. Excepting from nine o'clock in the mornings until six o'clock in the afternoons, Mondays through Saturdays, he was even apt to address her, in a soft inhibited suggestive tone which at least excited him, if not her, precisely so: "Pretty kitten, pretty little kitty. . . ." Certainly, he'd have told Robb not to melt down the little head for that quality of kittenishness: it was among the very attributes that had recently made him consider proposing marriage.

And Betty, who'd been cultivating it now for about eight years,

would have been puzzled and possibly even hurt to see Robb's reaction. The alarm she felt, when she rushed to the mirror to see if it were still there, on the morning after her automobile ride with George Morley III, could by no means be described as slight.

At first it seemed to her quite gone; a thing of the past. Yet then with only a little effort she was able to recapture it . . . She gave the glass one or two of those looks she'd found most destructive to her boss, and she knew immediately that she'd hear him say again, inane as a moonstruck frog, "Kitten, pretty little kitty." And of course she could have him for a husband. She'd never been positive before, but now she saw that of course she could.

And she would; just another "of course."

But all that was a matter for other days, bread-eating days, dull soup days, respectable be-glad-you've-paid-the-mortgage days. Today—

Suddenly she put down the mirror, whirled around a couple of times like a dervish, and flung herself on the bed as if she were diving into a pool of water. So—!

How fantastic, she saw it now, to have gone along so many years, almost twenty-three years, and never to have understood, never to have *understood*, never to have seen through all the lies and pretenses and shams at all, but instead to have taken them seriously, to have supposed that being "a nice girl" was something different from being duped, cheated, actually *cheated*! To have gone along all those years, listening to the insipid love songs about kissing your hand Madame, and drinking to me only with thine eyes, and to have thought there really was any connection, any at *all* between that nonsense and the way it really was! Why, God, the boy had been like a wolf, he'd gone ravening through her defenses like a tiger through straw barricades, he'd devoured her with no more thought of *her*, Betty Nixon, than a shark would have for the personality of a fish about to become its dinner! *That* was what it was like, it wasn't at all a May-I-have-this-dance arrangement—as soon as you weren't dancing—the way they kept pretending it was, the silly love stories and the women's magazines! It wasn't nice, there wasn't anything in the least nice about it, she found it quite the opposite and resolved, lying on the bed, her eyes closed, never to go for long without it. In her life, she had never felt so clean of annoyances.

Or perhaps the annoyances—and she herself had certainly been one of her own annoyances—had never begun to show themselves so unimportant: in just a moment or two, a moment or many of the moments last night, she had found all that was important. All the rest of living, the bridge parties and visits to the dentist, the art galleries, the novels to sob over, the golf tournaments and charity balls, all that kind of thing was after all just the glass from which one drank the wine.

She shifted on the bed, admitted to her body that it was a fine body and that she really loved it, and went on elaborating the idea that life was only such a moment, or that living was just a series of bridges for getting to such moments. She thought, *So then I am a sensualist!* . . . and laughed, agreeing.

And that boy, that George— Abruptly, she realized something wholly surprising: that she must have been acting a bit of a fool over him for weeks—and certainly she hadn't known why, in fact she hadn't even known she *was*. But he'd said last night, in his rough, sullen, wonderful, contemptuous voice: "Oh, come off it! Don't act coy *now*, for Christ's sake, when you've been doing your damndest to give me hot pants for weeks!" Well, *well!* In her whole life she'd never been talked to in such a way, such a marvelous and awful way, somehow so *deliciously* brutal. But what about him, anyway? Certainly he must be a couple of years younger than she, still in college and a friend of Robb's; and yet he already knew, must have known for a long time . . . (Poor Robb, poor thing; but then, he could turn into a great artist or something.) But what about that George, George— "My God! What's his last name, what on earth is my man's last name?" She flushed pink with the sudden shock of having to admit she didn't know. A play had come out a couple of years before in which the hero couldn't remember his pregnant mistress' name: Betty recalled now that her entire sorority house had been titillated. But now, of course, when she saw what she saw, about the glass being just a glass and the wine being— Well, she realized, those girls were simply children, after all.

"Nevertheless. . . ." Getting off the bed, beginning to dress: "I think I might as well have Steuben glass, yes, Steuben for mine, thank you." Then meeting herself in the mirror, she felt wonderful, wicked. She made another kitten-glance, one even more disturbing

than she'd planned, and consented matter-of-factly (for there was no triumph here; triumph was last night; triumph would come again) to marry him, Mr. Trotter, her nice foolish frog of a boss.

Both Mr. Morley and his son made a great point of avoiding the affectations and vices of the rich, for they quite truly despised everything patently exclusive and flagrantly upper-class. Yet, since they were neither fools nor snobs, whenever they saw something especially desirable they were apt to take it, whether only a rich person could afford it or not. On the Sunday morning of the weekend begun by McNaughton's party, they rose early, as always, breakfasted heartily (but very wisely: the coarsest and darkest of coarse dark bread, the juices unsweetened, the hothouse figs unpeeled), and when they had finished, the father said proudly to his son, "Come look at what's in the library, and tell me what you think of it, h'm, George?"

What was in the library was a full set of muslin glass designed by Josef Hoffmann of Vienna, and one flint pitcher, of Venetian diamond technique, attributed to Henry Stiegel. •

George and his father pulled up chairs to the library table and examined the little masterpieces for at least thirty minutes.

For the most part their appreciation was inarticulate, yet each was aglow with admiration and pleasure; and each knew how the other felt. From time to time one of them would reach out a big, thickly powerful Morley hand and pick up with it, quite tenderly, very gently, whichever exquisite shining object had caught his eye.

From time to time, a Morley voice would growl, "That's a sweet line, where it joins the stem. That's really what I'd call one very nice, sweet, warm little line."

Of the Stiegel, Mr. Morley said: "I saw that, George, and I said, 'By Jove, Morley old man, *there is a pitcher!*'"

Then they laughed as if at something very witty, Hoffmann and Stiegel having made them that happy.

"Of course, I may have been taken for a hay ride. . . . No, really, it's such a damned *honest* pitcher, I wouldn't much care if it's not a Stiegel at all. It is honesty. In *itself*."

"Exactly! I know what you mean, sir."

When they'd been silent for a while, Mr. Morley lighted a cigar and said rather sadly, "I—must confess to you, George, that sometimes I have—oh, an unpleasant sort of feeling, in a way—about," he gestured toward the glasses, "all this sort of thing. You know? Maybe you're just a little young to know, but sometimes it's possible to wish you'd been yourself at an *older* time, so that you could have dealt with some particular situation that occurred in a younger and less— What word do I want? Less imaginative, less sympathetic time in your life. What I'm talking about, of course, is the last year or so your mother was alive—a little over a year really, from October of twenty-nine until she—passed away—in January of thirty-one."

George waited. The only thing he could think of to do was to put his hand on his father's shoulder, and he couldn't possibly do that.

"H'm. That entire time—I didn't—I wasn't, I mean *fully*, the way I realize now I should have been. Could have been, too, easily enough." He dragged on his cigar; the heavy jaw reasserted itself; his voice lost a little of its momentary softness. "I'm not a regretter. I've never been, and I'll never *be* a regretter."

"No, sir. You've no cause to be: you were always fine with Darl'. She adored you."

Mr. Morley seemed not to have heard. "What I'm trying to say is that your mother was more fragile—in a way not just physical—than I quite realized. And things like this, this beautiful stuff, remind me of her sometimes."

He went on smoking; they were quiet together.

"When the Crash came, I remember," and the memory made him smile, "she came to me—I guess she'd read something in the papers—and she said, 'What' happened? What has *happened*, George? . . .' I tried to explain a little; you know how it is. But she didn't understand it. Naturally, couldn't be expected to. 'Can't they find out who—*did* it?' she wanted to know. 'I mean, can't whoever did it be caught, *stopped*, made to—' 'Made to what, Darl'?" He gestured. "And she just stared at me. She was so frightened; she was terrified. So I laughed, I really did, I can remember touching her, laughing. She just stood there, with tears in her eyes. H'm— She was a very beautiful woman. Maybe you were a bit young to appreciate her beauty fully; but she was one of the most beautiful women I've ever seen. If she'd had more—*vitality*, I think she'd have been the

most beautiful." Picking up a wineglass, turning it, playing with its lights: "Anyway, for all that, she may have been more right than I thought, since President Whitney of the New York Stock Exchange just *does* happen to be residing in Sing Sing at the moment!"

They chuckled companionably; they'd quickly have hanged him.

"At any rate, I said, 'Darl', this is just something to separate the men from the boys, that's all this amounts to! Yet, you see, George, I should have gotten to her somehow, more than that. I should have held her on my lap, or something. The way you'd comfort a child, I mean. I didn't really know how scared she was. And then," he lifted his head, blew smoke rings, made that troublesome thing in his chest stop hurting, "there was the matter of that damned Joan. Her maid, Joan. I guess a man just doesn't have any idea how much a woman like Darl' can depend on her personal maid. I hated to let Stanley go, but, once I'd decided I must, why, then Joan certainly had to go as well—after all, we kept only Mrs. Good and Tokyo on, you know—"

(In hospital, they remembered—both at once—the begging in delirium: "If Joan would only come to brush my hair!")

"But *sir*," George protested, "she'd certainly have caught pneumonia sooner or later! Or else something else. Darl' was *always* frail!"

"Oh, certainly. I'm not saying Joan could have made her want to live— Because, you know, that's what it comes to: she just didn't care to go on, scrimping, watching every little thing. I can't blame her. And I used to be after her to be efficient suddenly. Lord Almighty, how could Darl' be efficient? She wasn't *made* to be some blasted head clerk in an office! But Joan could have taken care of her. They do, I've come to see they really do. They say, 'Madame must have her rest, or she may seem tired tomorrow,' and—they can be very firm—they just plop them down and lower the shades! And they exercise them and massage 'em, and they compliment them a lot. Actually, what it amounts to, George, is: a good maid knows how to give a woman a certain kind of reassurance, the sort of thing Darl' really *had* to have. I see it so well now that I can't grasp why I didn't see it then."

The reverberating young growl: "I don't know what you could have done, sir. There just *wasn't* the money, was there?"

Mr. Morley looked at him in surprise. "Oh, I wasn't knocked on

my kaziester exactly, George. I'd dumped quite a little beforehand, y'know. After all, it didn't take me *completely* by surprise—there'd been warnings, if you had eyes in your head. So you might say there *was* the money, money enough. It was just that I needed everything I could get to go on fighting. Every penny. Everything. Of course! . . . But don't you see what I'm getting at? If I'd known what the pitiful little bit I was gaining by not keeping Joan was going to—Y'see *that* particular little bit wouldn't have turned any tricks one way or the other. She finally wanted to stay on for just five-ten dollars a month! (Stanley asked the same, but I *had* to refuse: that kind of thing would just make everyone uncomfortable—they'd be neither fish nor fowl, no self-respect, and the whole equilibrium of our relationship would've been destroyed. You see that, don't you?) But, anyway, to show you what I mean about your mother: for example, she kept suggesting: 'Sell the pictures. Why can't we sell the pictures?' And of course that was so ridiculous I'd have to be a little sharp with her: 'We're just not *about* to sell any pictures *this* season, Darl'! Not on your li—'

He paused, chilled at the aborted word. He pushed a glass farther from the edge of the table.

"My idea being that of all *times*— To get anything like their real value, why—just out of the question! Europe was sending scalpers over here by the boatload, and some of my closest friends panicked and parted with things they'd treasured for years! . . . No, I just happened to be a little bit too smart for *that*, thank you!"

George told himself there was no use in bothering about such affairs at all. What did he want his father to have done, to have panicked? So now they wouldn't have the Rubens? They wouldn't have Van Dyck, and what stupid Frenchman would be looking at their Romney? And of course servants would be unbearable if you didn't pay them. Five-ten dollars a month—imagine anyone suggesting that! Why, at that rate you could *not* have half a dozen servants a hundred years before they'd pay for a Rubens anyway—No, he must have made a mistake somewhere: that was wrong.

"What I'm trying to say is: Darl' never knew and she never cared how far toward the top of the heap I might happen to be. She knew just that living was supposed to be done in a certain way—actually, she *created* beauty, I think, by her very way of living. And though

as I say I'm not a regretter, I sometimes wish I'd been more alert in trying to preserve that *feel* of living for her. I should've done my fighting more on the Q.T. I should never have let her see a struggle was going on at all."

"Sir, I repeat: you have nothing to feel that way about! You were always wonderful to Darl' and swell to me. If she were here today, I know she'd say the same thing. And as for me, I think—and I've thought since I was *born*—you're simply *great*!"

"I thank you—very sincerely—for that. You've always been my reason for existing—you two, Darl' and you." And for a moment it seemed wisest not to trust his voice. "But let me show you, just to get the record straight: you take the episode about her car. Well, I certainly wasn't going to have *her* drive, *herself*, after we had to let Stanley go, so I saw no point in keeping her car at all. And that was another mistake. That *scared* her. Not having her own car in the garage—even if she couldn't drive it—took away her confidence . . . What you've always got to remember, George, is: confidence is nine tenths of any battle."

Confidence, confidence. George remembered a splinter of a scene that had occurred a few months before his mother's death. She'd forgotten a scarf; she went to the next room for it. When she returned, his father had reproached her jokingly, "Darl', why didn't you send me for that? You never seem to ask me to do anything for you any more. What's wrong: no confidence in me?" She'd murmured something, turned away—and George had felt uncomfortable without knowing why. A splinter of a scene, inexplicably recalled. He hadn't known her well at all, because he'd never spent much time with her really, and, besides, so many things about her—her scent, even the delicacy of her throat and wrists—had always seemed to him to stress a remoteness. Apparently, then, they hadn't gotten on well, toward the last? Automatically, he was on his father's side. Confidence, confidence. . . .

"You're absolutely right about confidence," he blurted, wanting to turn the conversation from the family, "and Stanley, as I remember, had plenty of it; he probably had no trouble finding some job or other somewhere." He hadn't realized at all how it would sound.

His father stared at him.

"Anyway, maybe his wife worked," he added quickly, to erase the other, and saw too late it only made matters worse.

"Stanley was divorced, I believe. He had a little girl."

"Oh, yes, I remember her. She was that cute little kid who did tap dancing, wasn't she?"

Mr. Morley's face had gone hard, but at this it softened into a grin. "No, no, George. That was Joan's daughter. I didn't mean Stanley had a youngster at all. But he did have a very cute little girl. I remember dancing with her at a Christmas party once."

They laughed, the momentary tension somewhat eased.

A friend of Mr. Morley's, a brilliant fellow who'd undergone psychoanalysis, had explained to him that the chief obstacle to friendship and honesty between father and son lay in the ordinary father's prohibitions, implied or expressed, on the score of sex. The friend had gone into the matter with great earnestness: he saw its correction as the hub of a whole new social order. The idea had made sense to Mr. Morley, never in any case a prude. Consequently, George and he were in the habit of discussing women, sex, contraceptives, love, flirtations, and venereal diseases with approximately the same frankness they'd employ in discussing the works of Eugène Delacroix. Therefore, George now, to lessen the lingering tiny uncomfortableness between them: "I had an odd thing happen to me last night, sir."

"H'm. I thought I heard you drive in pretty late. So?"

"It was one of those girls who seem so experienced—sort of smug and sophisticated, you know, sir? Strictly the little fashion plate, and she smokes a lot, y'see? She has a very decent job and all that; something in personnel work. Well, anyway, it was absolutely the damndest thing. It never even occurred to me (oh, by the way, she's well over the age of consent) that she might not be, oh, I mean *very* experienced."

"H'm. And she wasn't?"

"And she wasn't."

Mr. Morley shook his head, sympathetically. "That will happen sometimes. Had she been—invitational?"

"Oh, definitely. Strictly."

"So, what's your reaction? You feel like a heel or something?"

"Not exactly. But it's funny. I'd never been with a—virgin, y'know."

"H'm. Well— As I say, that kind of thing just will happen sometimes."

A space of moments to consider it.

"Any likelihood of trouble? I mean, from her family? I gather she isn't a debutante."

"Trouble, sir? Why should there be trouble? I was definitely careful. God, I always am—and I mean we parted on what you might call the absolutely best of terms!"

Mr. Morley shook his head; and had to smile, not at George's little attempt at wit, but instead at his naïveté. "Naïveté, thy name is George, of the House of Morley!"

"I—don't follow you."

"Not surprising. Well, I'll tell you: during that year you went to art school, I thought there'd be no question but what some little Bohemian would try to snare you. Frankly, I was sure of it. As a matter of fact—"

"Snare me? What do you mean?"

"I mean snare you. Into holy matrimony. As a matter of fact, I even had Thompson go into the legal aspects of such a contingency quite thoroughly. H'm. But you survived very well—though possibly just because one has only to suggest sleeping with girls nowadays, apparently, before they oblige. Or at least that's all you find it necessary to do!" He chuckled: they were, after all, his conquests too; physically, he'd just been duplicated by his son. "H'm. But now that you're attending a public university—"

"Sir!" George had always been so sure their relationship was one of mutual respect, truly on a man-to-man basis, that to learn now he'd been thought of as a child and had been discussed secretly with a creeping lawyer—and at that, his *libido* discussed—was too infuriating to be borne. He had to strike out quickly in defense of his adulthood. "They were ruining my style in that filthy art school. I certainly work just as hard at the university—and here, in my studio here—as I ever did at that art school! You didn't put up any argument to U.C.: you even said it would be nice to have me around for a change!"

"Come, George, you don't seem to be riding on my train: why should I have put up any argument to whatever you chose to do? Certainly you work as hard at painting as I ever did at anything, and I'm known as a worker!"

"It is as hard painting, it's harder painting—"

"D'you think I don't know that? Calm yourself: your great-grandfather happened to like to work at making money, and so did your grandfather and your father—so why *shouldn't* you tackle something else if you want to? It happens to be my opinion that if a man doesn't work hard at one thing or another he eventually winds up wishing he were dead, but God, boy, I *know* you're a worker. Remember what they wrote me at the art school? 'Your son exhibits talent and another quality even rarer—a tolerance for work'? Scarcely anything ever pleased me more. Just why you consider U.C. better for your purposes than art school, or a year in Paris, or even Princeton or Yale or Stanford I can't fathom, but since you do, fine. It's entirely your affair, and of course it's grand—more than grand—having you around."

Somewhat placated: "I told you; art schools ruin your style. And Paris is *passé*, and all the rest is puppy-water."

"Yes, well, it's certainly fine with me. The only thing I was trying to say is that now, with you actually *in* a public university, I've definitely been expecting more of the kind of thing we were talking about: trouble with the sort of girl you had last night."

"Sir, this girl isn't the trouble-making variety at all!" She had laughed; at the very moment—she had laughed!

"At least that's your hopeful opinion. Does she know who you are?"

Anger burned him again. Something had happened last night, after all—something between two people who were alive, who were young. Those hushed conversations with Thompson! How condescending and amused they must've been! He forgot to answer, the humiliation was that dulling.

"Does she or doesn't she know who you are?"

"She probably knows that—well, that I'm your son, if that's what you mean, because Robb probably—" he stopped abruptly, realizing he'd committed the error they never committed: he'd virtually named the girl; but his father waved him on— "told her what sort of house we have and so on."

"Robb's that albino?"

"Yeah."

"Seems a good kid."

"Is a good kid. I mean sure, I suppose she knows you're rolling,

but she did that last night because she wanted to, not because—”

“Oh, my dear young fool! Of *course* she did it last night because she wanted to! Who’s denying that? But when mama and papa find out, as certainly mama may, why, wedding bells could very possibly be in the air—deafeningly! Chances are about thirty to one in favor of it. That’s all I was trying to say.” He smiled fondly, indulgently; was not responded to. “But don’t spook—so long as you’re sure you’ve been careful. You won’t be twenty-one till December; and, as I told you, Thompson and I have things pretty well thought through in any case.”

George was famous for his temper; but he’d never lost it against his father before. “Did Thompson and you ever think through the fact that not everybody in the world is so crazy about money they’d push their daughter into marrying for it?”

“Don’t flare up, George. I’ve seen plenty of daughters do their own pushing, so far as that goes. The only way you can *ever* be sure a girl is marrying you—or even wanting you—rather than your bank account, is to know damned well she has a bank account of her own. It’s as simple as that.”

“Sir!”

But Mr. Morley waved him down. “Just take it from me and don’t argue. Remember I’ve been around a long, long time, and I’ve had to tote a pretty substantial fur-lined cross around with me the whole time!” He looked for a smile; looked in vain.

“It isn’t that I’m arguing the case for this particular girl—I don’t even *know* her very well!” (Yet George knew he knew her well enough; and knew himself well enough.) “But do you honestly mean to say, then, that you think most girls, and most girls’ parents, would, just for money—”

Mr. Morley nodded. “Precisely. You’ve grasped it admirably.”

“What’s the difference between saying that and saying everybody’s either a whore or a pimp?”

Slowly, with annoyance: “I say what I said: that the only way you can ever be safe against being married for your money is to marry somebody *with* money. *Ever*. Regardless of what they told you in the Sunday school classes.”

And that was too much, that last phrase, too much by far for George.

"Well, then, I say, and I never realized it before, in fact it never even occurred to me before, but, sir, you're nothing but a—*a cynic!*"

Mr. Morley stared a moment—and then put back his head and laughed so hard and so long he finally began to cough.

"I love you, George. I wouldn't trade you!"

He rose, still chuckling, to put his hand on the boy's shoulder and ask in a conciliatory tone, "Let's go to the club and have a round of golf, shall we?"

No answer.

"H'm. What about it?"

George shrugged off the hand and replied sullenly: "No. I've got work to do."

Quickly turning cross: "Oh, very well. Stay at home and pout, then—like the great stupid baby you seem to be!"

But as he was leaving the room, the boy's gesture of pulling away from his hand began to hurt him so much he flashed out angrily: "Nevertheless, I may as well drive home one little point right now, as long as the matter's come up: whatever day you get yourself roped into marrying a chippie—or some nice eager little working girl, for that matter—is exactly the same day you and I are through! You hear that?"

And when George merely glared at him contemptuously, he became ashamed, surprised at his own gaucherie, and therefore insisted loudly, though increasingly uncertain as to what had happened: "I mean it, boy, not the first *dime!*"

"Why. Why, you God damned bastard!" George growled softly on the moment his father had passed earshot—and then was so shocked by his own sacrilege that his heart leaped.

It was as if he'd been tricked by the cleverest of magicians, and couldn't even begin to comprehend how what he had just seen happen had happened, how such a cheap, self-important cynic could have slipped with such suddenness from hiding, to ruin, so devastatingly, the man he had respected so long.

"You God damned stuffy sneaking bastard!" he made himself repeat; and this time hated. "And so Joan even had a little *kid* to support, and you didn't even care about *that!*"

For perhaps a quarter of an hour he continued to sit motionlessly,

with the old sickened love turning in him again and again like a spear of sharpened glass.

All day long he retained the hurt. Working did not lessen it, though he worked hard.

That evening, lacking a priest, a soothsayer, a psychoanalyst, an articulate lover, or a mentor, he drove to see McNaughton.

McNaughton was at home for two reasons: not only had his mother retained her feeling that he needed punishment for the indiscretions of racial tolerance and noise, but she'd also been profoundly shocked, through a recent reference question, by Queen Christina's many follies, both licentious and political.

So he thought, the first moment he saw George looming sullenly at the door, that here might be a way to arrange for his soul to be fed by Greta Garbo after all.

But he rejected the notion immediately: his sensitivity for mood was too acute.

George grunted an invitation, "Let's go drive"; and though Mrs. McNaughton sighed her disapproval they were promptly in his car.

They drove up Marin Avenue, steep as any ladder, until they'd reached its summit.

The lights of all Berkeley, the ships and waters of San Francisco Bay, were theirs. Nor did it seem likely the world itself could extend much farther than the darkly sparkling vastnesses lying open to their view.

They sat quiet for several minutes staring; depressed as brooding gods.

After a while George brought out at least the fringe of his problem and hung it on the air between them. "At home there's a portrait, McNaughton, of my grandfather. By Eastman Johnson. And it looks exactly like me. You know what I mean: except for the mustache and some fat around the jowls, and wrinkles, naturally. I always thought it looked just like my father. Then a couple of years ago I saw it looked just like me. I always knew I looked like my father, but you see what I mean: even though I knew I looked like him and he looked like the picture, I never knew I looked like the picture. Well, when finally I did, I just reacted: *Well, so I do, so what?* And if anything, one way or another, I thought it was swell.

"And then—lately—just very lately—I've begun to wonder, supposing you don't want, for example, some of the things that happen to—well, to a man's face, to his ideas, to happen to yours? How much *does* a guy get to say about it? I just got to wondering. You see what I mean, at all?"

"Yes. Yes. I see what you mean," McNaughton answered softly. "It's a very interesting question. A hard devil, too. And certainly not very pleasant: Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, I snap you in a trap you will not leave, even when you die."

"You take the time I had that model, the one with the shadows, you remember her, McNaughton?"

"Shadows like bruises under the skin, but changing on the quarter hour, certainly I remember. The one you used for your 'Hands and Feet of One Just Dead.'"

"But they looked like purple fish, the way I painted her hands and feet."

"Never mind. It must've been a crucifixion to paint. It just doesn't exist."

"That's what I thought: it just doesn't exist. Then this is the point: I mentioned it to my father and he came to the studio one day to have a look at her. So— So, McNaughton, afterward he thought it was funny that I was supposed to be a painter and didn't even know what I was painting."

McNaughton looked at him questioningly.

"Because he said it was semistarvation, prolonged malnutrition that made her look like that."

McNaughton stared at him in silence for a full five seconds; then shivered.

"If there happened to be a bowl of oranges, or anything, she'd always ask to have some. But I never thought— I always supposed she just liked fruit."

"The world," McNaughton muttered, "is as dark as that bay."

"And I said, 'My God!' and all that, you know. You know how you would: it made me sick to my stomach." After a moment's pause: "I wished I'd never painted her. It would you too? It would anybody?"

Nodding, slowly: "Emily Dickinson was wrong: most lives have closed something like a thousand times before they close."

"And he said—this is what I'm getting at, McNaughton—he said, 'I dare say the number of hours spent by human beings in a hungry condition might very easily treble the number of hours spent by human beings in a satisfied condition. On second thought, I'll put a zero after that three. You might even say it appears to be the natural state of the beast.' He said that."

McNaughton said nothing.

They both sat wordless for a while, afraid. Prehistoric animals had risen to prowl around them, to sniff their blood.

"So now you're asking me if I think you'll have to sit for Eastman Johnson one day?"

"Yes. Yes, I guess—"

"Then allow me the filthy trick of answering your question with another question, Morley: isn't all freedom of choice completely illusory anyway? Schopenhauer says yes. Perhaps he's right!"

After a moment, the rough growl: "I say Schopenhauer can go to hell, then. I say no! No! I say: freedom of choice is *not* illusory!"

Noticing that the hands on the wheel had become fists, McNaughton smiled in the darkness. "You believe a man can create himself?"

"I believe a guy can be however he wants to be. God damn it, he *can*!"

"You really think it's possible ever to be a human being in your own right? Aren't we all, always, designed essentially to be just the sons of our fathers?"

"No! No! Not necessarily!"

"Johnny Rue can change the color of his skin?"

"That's not fair. That's not the kind of thing I was talking about."

"No, I grant you: that wasn't fair. But this is: if by some miracle he could change his skin right now, could he change the habit of thinking that his parents have been giving him for twenty years?"

"Why *not*?" Furious, almost strangling with fury: "Why *can't* he?"

McNaughton began to feel an emotion not unrelated to terror. He grew aware for the thousandth time of some unnamed inadequacy within himself, yet it was not this so much as the violence of vitality he felt in George that awakened fear. It began to seem enormously important that George be made to admit the futility of effort. "He

can't because he's been born into a prison," he explained patiently. "What do you mean?"

"I mean every man alive was born in prison, Morley. Don't you know that? A prison that says whether all his life it'll seem natural to him to read words up and down or from left to right, whether it will seem natural for women to be pampered or made to do the heavy work. Things as basic as that."

"I'm not talking about being born in China. I'm not even talking about anything like that at *all*! I'm talking about right here and now: can I turn into *me* instead of some guy in a God damned picture I don't think I even *like* any more?"

"Let me spell it out for you: a man isn't born into a prison, then. He's born into a whole *maze* of prisons! Even before he's born, you can see them reaching out for him—his jailers, themselves jailed—" But before he knew what was happening, the talk had related to himself: he began seeing himself, a long thin sickly infant, delivered to the McNaughtons with some vital organ missing, some drop of the fiery fluid withheld. He saw them, his parents, from the depths of an old helpless childish anger he hadn't known he'd kept; he saw his father tall and fragile in black, his mother worrying, baffled by storms and spring, much too conscious of far too many laws. He, this infant abominably named Marion, seemed to be wanting something, yowling for something, a nipple or a tickle or the shock of warmth; and they had misplaced it, the thing he wanted, or didn't recognize its worth. What he felt, for one moment, was intolerable, unassuageable.

His voice grew passionate, "They've decided even before he's born what country he's going to have to call *his* country, and all that obscenity! They've decided which set of superstitions he's got to call *his* religion, and be loyal to! They get him registered, mind you, before he can crawl, as an Episcopalian or a Shintoist or a Mormon, and that's supposed to *do* something! And the horrible part is: it does! And even before he's born they've decided which sections of his body he's going to be able to admit he has, and which ones he's to keep covered up and deny having all the time! The first set of jailers is his family, Morley, and they arrange with the second set of jailers, his teachers, just when the first set of lies will be told him: Santa Claus, school spirit; and just when the second set of lies will

be told him: masturbating stunts your growth, baths are good for you—or, take Egypt, take the essence of Christianity: life is merely the preparation for death!”

“O.K., O.K., but when he *sees* it like this, why won’t he just rise up and *smash* the prisons and *kill* the damned jailers, McNaughton?”

“Ah, you babble like a simpleton! Don’t you see he can’t? He can’t because they’ve got him tied and gagged with love—and duty? Love and duty make him pay homage to the mistakes and stupidities and terrors and hypocrisies of his ancestors by repeating them for himself! Nothing else could make him do it, but love and duty can. And if he won’t, if he chooses not to, it means killing and smashing indeed! And that in turn means living in a dark and lonely forest. A wilderness, really. And who can do that? Who can do that?”

“I don’t know what you mean, ‘a dark and lonely forest,’ McNaughton. Talk English. Why can’t he?”

“Because of this, just this: we get the foolishness so deep in us by the time we’re ten, we’ll always wonder—supposing we do break away—if perhaps we shouldn’t be half-ashamed of ourselves after all! Always ill at ease, somewhere hidden in the intestines. Let an Irishman say he’s all past hating the English, for example. Take me, then: I’ve got this shabby-genteel thing so ground into me, the Daddy-was-a-minister-and-Mummy-is-a-nice-librarian-lady set of snobberies and inhibitions so deeply ground into me—”

He broke off, aghast to discover himself thinking, precisely as he knew his mother would have thought: *How ludicrous this is, to be haranguing like some wild Italian fisherman, raising my voice and getting so excited, with not the slightest idea of proportion, to be so lost in this adolescent conversation, taking myself so seriously!*

But if he was aghast to think as his mother would be thinking, he was nevertheless incapable, suddenly, of thinking any other way. “Urbanity, urbanity,” he muttered—and closed his eyes and leaned his head back on the car upholstery, as if some indescribable weariness were consuming him.

George begged him to come to life.

But all that he was given was the mumble: “‘Do I dare disturb the universe? In a minute there is time For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.’”

after the weekend

One noontime when the two of them were eating their lunches on the University lawn, Terrence complained to Robb about a new difficulty in his life. He complained softly, not precisely as if he were resigned but yet as though the difficulty were insoluble. "The hardest times are Saturdays or holidays like Easter week, when I can't paint here. *He's* home so much lately. He can't find work and he just stays around—"

"You mean your father?"

"Who else? . . . Oh, Bud? Bud doesn't bother me. He'll even pose. More or less. Y'know, if he just happens to be sitting there anyway. No, I mean *him*. Y'know it's always been hard enough to paint in that house anyway, even when he isn't there, and now with you having that engraving job at McCormick's, I can't go to your place either."

"You couldn't paint at Mrs. Galmayer's?"

Terrence shook his head. "She keeps wanting me to be subconscious too much lately."

"Wanting you to be *what*?"

"Subconscious. In my painting."

"Collin, what are you talking about?"

Patently: "She wants me to be subconscious in my painting, which I can do just fine except when she's watching me. I mean she keeps wanting me to do what she calls 'flow and relax.' She's off, Nixon,

honestly. Goofy. Batty. Really weird. What she likes is automatic writing—she says it ‘releases’ her. Life will ‘sing’ to me, she says, if I’ll ‘just not lock it out!’ And all crap like that. And then she keeps wanting me to be spontaneous, only she tells me *when* to be. Like, “This afternoon I want you to do a spontaneous water color of children playing in the park.” I’m too academic. Who’d ever have heard of Van Gogh, she asks me, if he’d painted slow and careful, the way I do?”

“Oh, God.”

“I know it. So anyway, what I’ve discovered is if I use a lot of purple and gray and make the outlines blurred, she thinks I’m being subconscious as all hell. And naturally I tell her it took less time than it did.”

Reflectively: “Collin, you really *do* have your share of grief.”

“Oh, it’s not so bad. But I mean I’m just explaining why I can’t paint at her house either.”

After a moment’s thought: “Listen, I have it! Why don’t you use Morley’s place?”

Terrence merely stared at him.

“Hell, yes! He’s got a studio the size of a tennis court. Great light. Everything. Haven’t you ever been there?”

Terrence shook his head.

“Well, go there, Collin. He wouldn’t care. And it’s perfect: he even has models come. Didn’t you know that?”

Terrence cleared his throat. “Yes, but I— See, y’know Morley and I, well, we don’t always hit it off so hot.”

Robb studied him for a moment. “You’re too thin-skinned. Morley’s all right. He’s not hard to get along with.”

“Oh, I know it. It’s just that—” He looked down at his broken shoes, as if they would answer for him. They did.

“What difference does that make?”

“What? Does what make?”

“You know what I mean, Collin. And besides, you’ve got to get over being afraid of people all the time. What’s there to be so afraid of, anyway?”

Furious, flushing: “Afraid? Who’s afraid? What d’you mean, afraid?”

“O.K., O.K. Skip it. But seriously, now that I’m working on Satur-

days, you'd better start using George's place. I'm telling you—nobody will care. Just pretend it's a public library."

"Oh, sure."

"No, really!"

"But, suppose I did, and—his old man, Mr. Morley— Does he come around much?"

"Not too much. Anyway, he's O.K., Terrence. I've met him. He's just like anybody else."

"Yeah, I'll bet. Just exactly."

"No, I mean it. He's fine, I'm not kidding; he is."

"Nixon, *all* the rich people I've ever known are—pretty batty."

"'All the rich people I've ever known!' How many've you known?"

"Well, I've known—Mrs. Galmayer. If she isn't balmy, nobody is."

"So that's one. Who else? You know *any* other rich people, besides George? . . . You wouldn't call *him* balmy, I hope?"

Terrence fell silent. George was an exception, he was positive. Great wealth *did* make people batty, like Mrs. Galmayer: he'd seen that much himself. And he'd read about the Robber Barons. Great wealth either made people quite vicious like that, or batty, or—most often—soft, effeminate. His father had said so, at least a hundred times. George wasn't really what he'd consider a rich person by nature; it was more as if he'd been born to a rich father by mistake. George's hands were like a prize fighter's. He ate grapes by holding a big bunch to his mouth and then biting into it and chewing the whole thing, stems and seeds and all. He liked pickled pigs' feet; sometimes he even belched. He made mistakes that were suitable only for poor people: "I laid down," and, "Who'd ya ask?" He wasn't especially clean; with a whole bathroom just to himself and no one to shout at him about the gas and water bills, he still wasn't especially clean.

"Well, *would* you call George nuts?"

He answered hesitantly, "Of course not. Morley's a very fine guy and all, Nixon, but he isn't—what I'd call—really a rich person anyway. Like it just isn't his nature, *see*, to be rich?"

"No, I don't see."

"Well, for example, the only thing I'd call being like a rich person about George is that he paints."

After chewing, thoughtfully: "Collin, you're the one who's nuts."

"I'm not either. Everybody knows painting is more something for,

oh, say, the aristocracy or somebody like that than for, well, say somebody like—well, take my father.”

“Your *father*? You mean because he’s poor or because—he’s so tough?”

“Both. Because in a way, they go together. And painting doesn’t go with them.”

“Some of the best ones were poor and tough.”

“Not *really* tough, Nixon. And not really poor; not *all* the time. Like Gauguin was pretty well off before he started being poor. And he wore earrings, anyway, even afterwards.”

Robb made an exasperated gesture. “Collin, let’s get back to the point. Are you going to begin going to George’s, or aren’t you?”

“You don’t even see what I’m talking about.”

“All right, so I don’t. But what I was asking before you started on all that anyway, was just why not begin going to George’s whenever you can’t come to my place? And now so far as I can see, you’re just making up a lot of stuff to rationalize why you won’t go, and the real reason is only that you’re afraid. Don’t be so silly. Nobody’s going to hurt you.”

“Why, God damn it, what do you think I am, some scared little kid, or something? What do I care about what kind of house—”

“So go tomorrow. Tell him this afternoon you’re going, and go tomorrow.”

Putting at his sandwich, Terrence reflected Robb was acting more and more like this lately, ever since taking that job at McCormick’s. But there seemed no way out. Then Robb’s voice grew kinder: “Really, Collin: just pretend it’s a public library”; and he saw he had to go.

He was only about three or four blocks from the Morely mansion a few days later, carrying his painting kit and utterly involved with considering the tantalizing number of greens on the well-tended grounds of the neighborhood, when a black Cadillac pulled over to the curb by him. He stopped walking, calmly enough, and turned to face it: somebody must want directions.

But a giant of a man with a heavy-jowled face leaned over and opened the door for him and told him to hop in. Terrence’s heart began pounding as if it meant to leave his chest.

He whispered, "How do you do?" inaudibly; and said, "Thank you, stir," plainly.

Imploring, "No, very much," he stayed rooted to the sidewalk.

Then, to correct the *stir*, he said, "sir." He realized this had to be George's father since they looked so much alike; and immediately, he resolved that if the giant asked him whether he was going to George's place, he'd just deny it. He'd deny even knowing George. If things like this were going to happen, it was just too much for anyone.

Mr. Morley, having growled his command once or twice, was growing impatient. He had no intention of asking Terrence where he was going, since it was obvious where he was going. When "I'm George's father," produced no response, and the third, "Hop in, hop in!" garnered only another idiotic mumble, he began to be annoyed. But he would not drive off. He had decided to give the kid a lift and he meant to do just that.

He resorted to staring Terrence into the car.

His eyes had done this sort of work for him often before, had purified employes of insubordination and mistresses of tantrums, had convinced business opponents there was no way out but surrender, and had drained enemies of fight. It wasn't much work for them, staring Terrence into a car.

But as soon as he'd got the boy seated, almost numb and totally dumb and pressed against the door, an odd gentleness visited him.

He realized that what he saw was terror rather than mere shyness, and he sensed, though the idea baffled him, that an entire history of terror must lie behind it. The boy seemed like a wild bird or some very young animal, completely ignorant of anything but the awareness of fear. The profile turned to him was one of the most perfect he'd ever seen, perhaps too perfect. The exhausted clothes were eloquent.

It occurred to him he ought to try to indicate he'd brought only his camera today, not his gun. "I'm sorry I don't know your name. I've seen sketches of you several times in George's studio. Driving up, I even recognized your painting kit."

"I'm named Terrence. Terrence Collin."

"What are you planning on, what sort of career, Terrence? Are you going to be a painter?"

"I— I do paint, sir. I mean I always *will* paint. But if you mean *be* a— I don't know. You see, I mean there's a Mrs. Galmayer that buys me things, and my brother always lets me live at home— But I don't know *what* I'll *be*, sir." His desperation came through, sounding out in the last words. He felt as if someone had started the roller coaster before he'd had time to grip the bar.

Very gently: "You're taking a teaching course now?"

"No sir, no sir, I'm *not* taking a teaching course. Mrs. Galmayer told me to take a Liberal Arts course. She doesn't want me to be a teacher. And neither do I."

"Is Mrs. Galmayer a friend of yours?"

"Oh, no sir! She's a lady. I mean she's not anything like a friend. Not what you'd call a *friend*! I met her through one of my high school art teachers. She buys me things, like I said, and wants me to remain faithful to—" But by now his own voice was echoing in his ears. He thought he had never talked so stupidly in his life. His words sounded to him as though they were spoken by a ten-year-old; their tone and tempo humiliated him unbearably: for some reason, everything had flooded out in a supplicating rush. He would not talk any more. He would never again come to George's house.

Mr. Morley hadn't heard his own voice so gentle in years: "Faithful to what, Terrence?"

He gulped and felt moisture in his eyes. "To my class. I'm poor. I mean we're *real* poor, sir. And she wants me to paint like that all the time."

"I see. That's very interesting."

Valiantly, Terrence tried not to say, "Yes, sir," and succeeded.

The grilled iron gate was open. Mr. Morley parked in the driveway. "Let's have something hot, shall we? Cup of hot chocolate?"

But Terrence's stomach went into a turmoil at the thought of trying to eat or drink anything in this presence. "No, thank you, sir. I'm not at all hungry."

"Oh? Well then, let's make it just tea." He rang for the servant and ordered.

It occurred to Terrence for the first time that a whole houseful of people lived to serve this man, had no reason for existence except to serve him, had been *born* to serve him. His emotion went past awe into veneration. And it suddenly flamed into his consciousness that,

besides, here was a man who went out every day to make reason for even more lives, to hold even more power, to have even more money; he'd never just loaf around at home, like Mrs. Galmayer, with money somebody'd given him.

They sat on the glassed-in side porch by themselves, since George was out, and waited for the tea. The largest chair there, a massive leather thing, happened to be situated not to Mr. Morley's liking: he went to it, picked it up effortlessly, carried it a yard or two and placed it where he wanted it. Terrence's sense of shock deepened: it wasn't at all as he had thought; apparently wealth didn't make a man soft, not in the least. Mr. Morley was as big and strong as his own father, but still could hire a hundred of his father! Never before had he even begun to suspect such a thing, but now he saw it so clearly he knew on the instant he'd never forget it: his father was nothing, nothing at all. *This* was power—this man, this giant, here.

The shock made him competent to drink the tea; he could not talk at all now, and yet was able to manage the purely animal processes much better than before.

Neither had Mr. Morley anything to say. The sight of Terrence's hand on the cup had caught at his mind oddly. He hadn't thought of her much since the Hoffmann-Stiegel conversation in the library a month or so ago, but he remembered now a little trick Darl' had had of holding a cup that was a bit like this boy's. He couldn't imagine why, but suddenly he remembered also how she'd looked at him one moment on their wedding night, her face pale, not a little frightened. Her soft weakness, the delicacy of her, the beauty! Well, he couldn't possibly have loved her more, couldn't have been gentler. He sighed; directed his attention to this rabbit, was then dazzled, startled, by a smile of total adoration.

George's car was a Chrysler sedan, shiningly new, and now, as proudly alive as a young bull, it came roaring importantly up the drive. Next to George sat Johnny Rue, whose entire face seemed to have disappeared into a grin. In the back seat lounged Marion McNaughton, fighting hard for the look of boredom, and winning. He'd seen ^{to} it that the four rear windows were rolled up—the temperature was fifty degrees and the April wind tore by too swift for children's kites—but George and Johnny had turned the front two down,

and as soon as the car stopped, they got out by putting themselves (without knowing precisely why) through these opened windows. The exhilaration of their own vitality had carried them momentarily beyond McNaughton's jurisdiction: no matter how contemptuously he scowled, they went on behaving absurdly young. They leaped over a fountain, balancing on their finger tips; and then again, without touching it. George turned a somersault. McNaughton walked behind them, an old man not a grandfather.

Mr. Morley and Terrence watched them unobserved; and Morley burst into a guffaw. "That McNaughton!" he exclaimed, chuckling. "I always get a boot out of that kid, don't you?"

It had never occurred to Terrence that anyone could conceivably speak of McNaughton as a kid, let alone as a kid to get a boot out of. To be asked to concur was simply a stunning proposition. He had assumed that everyone who knew him was deeply impressed by McNaughton; it seemed impossible not to fear him, to respect his brilliance. Or it *had* seemed impossible. But what he saw beginning to happen to McNaughton now, in his own mind, was as startling as what had just happened to his father. Who was McNaughton? Here was a man who knew more than McNaughton, in fact probably knew more than ten McNaughtons put together. "Yes, sir," Terrence said; "I certainly do." And he even chuckled a little, and truthfully.

Mr. Morley evaluated the sudden insolence wrongly, for he guessed it only about a twentieth as revolutionary as it was; nevertheless he had on the instant recalled a phrase of his son's, spoken contemptuously: "our own dear boy"; and he knew this chap must certainly be he, their own dear boy, and at the same instant he remembered what respectful shading George's voice had invariably given the name "McNaughton." He remembered several boasts deliberately casual: "McNaughton said he thought this sketch wasn't half bad, sir. What d'you say?" He slipped into a little laugh, precisely the unconscious laugh he'd have given some urchin brave with cigarettes behind a hedge in the park. Yet he couldn't help thinking, even while he laughed, that if this was an anti-McNaughton faction, he'd join it.

For Terrence the situation was nothing but bliss: they shared a joke, this giant and he! He'd found himself a giant who thought he was fine, gave him rides, drank tea with him, and even took for

granted he'd always seen how funny McNaughton was—as of course he had, of course he had, even if he'd never stopped to think of it before! He was so happy he felt almost drunk: his face shone with joy, a very respectful joy.

And for Morley it arrived a second time: a feeling of being worshiped. A strange sensation, and he couldn't convince himself it was unpleasant. The boy's hair was golden-brown, quite curly; his color was high; he wasn't really small, yet certainly a wrestler could break his bones without much trouble; he didn't look as though he got a great deal to eat. "Sure you don't want a sandwich?" Morley was about to ask, when his son entered—and was followed by what a pair of friends!

Johnny Rue, whom he'd never met, was presented: in order to be very sure, Mr. Morley rose, made a point of shaking hands, and felt relieved to see no evidence of tension (colored people had a natural poise; he had heard it was because they were suckled longer); then he turned to nod at McNaughton (that weary old man—what a comedy!) and found himself hoping for another fight with him.

George of course was hungry: plates of cold ham and Swiss cheese were soon going round. Terrence found he could eat now, and ate well. Johnny was almost completely at ease, far more at ease than he had been at McNaughton's place before the wine: he was at ease because this was not a private home; this was an institution or a house in the movies, and Mr. Morley was not a white man or a white boy's father, he was a millionaire. Millionaires were usually Edward Arnold in the movies, and he was familiar with Edward Arnold down to the last eye-flick, nothing to fear except when chewing a cigar, no cigar in sight, and further indications—like having stood up to shake hands with him—showed he was either running for office or dedicating a cornerstone, in which case it was probably a newsreel, therefore even simpler, even safer. Only McNaughton failed to eat well: he had so few opportunities, after all, to show how deeply he scorned money.

The talk went jabbing at university professors, pounced in contempt on a current public museum exhibition, and then settled down to worry the question of Rivera versus Rockefeller. Rivera's mural, commissioned for Rockefeller Center, had shown Mr. Rockefeller as of a pale green color and consorting with chorus girls, while Marx and Lenin were indicated to be rosy-complexioned and, unmistakably,

the Light, the Truth, Honor and the Way. It had been taken down, though not immediately. It had just now come down, its destruction just announced.

"Odd they hired him in the first place," Mr. Morley offered. "I can't quite follow their thinking."

McNaughton, though remembering to drawl, promptly disagreed. "To me there's nothing at all odd in their commissioning Rivera, but I admit it seems a little astonishing that they failed to ask for a preliminary sketch."

"Yeah," Johnny Rue said, wishing his father could see and hear him, "yeah. All they did, in effect, was to say: 'Here are the walls. You bring the paint!'"

Everyone laughed. He wished harder.

George asked, "Why didn't they, McNaughton? Why didn't they require a sketch?"

"Too touchy, I imagine. You know how touchy he's supposed to be." But that satisfied no one, least of all himself. "What would be your guess, sir?"

"My guess," Mr. Morley emphasized the word with slight annoyance, "is that if Rockefeller's representatives were half-witted enough to hire Rivera in the first place they could hardly be expected to have brains enough to think of requiring a sketch."

His son frowned slightly. "Oh, I don't know, sir. I think it's more that a fresco artist as big as that is used to a lot of leeway."

Mr. Morley snorted: "As big as that! As big as that! What's so tremendous about Diego Rivera? All he's ever done, that I've seen—and I was in Mexico City less than six months ago—is sheer poster work! Impossibly cruel landowners, and the downtrodden peasants, over and over, over and over! He reminds me of the hacks who do billboards for public safety projects and things of that kind!"

"Yes, I don't think it was because he was too 'big,' either, George," Terrence was thrilled to hear himself say; "I mean I'll bet they weren't afraid to ask Michelangelo for a preliminary sketch for the Sistine Chapel, and I'll bet they got one too!" And then it made him very happy to see Mr. Morley nod.

"But of course! Don't you remember?" McNaughton murmured. "It showed Judas Iscariot pretty as a peach and St. Paul covered with festering sores, and when the Pope saw it he said, 'Why, Mike old

boy, that will never do! You've got quite the wrong idea there!' and he made him start all over."

George howled at that, but Mr. Morley frowned ominously. He addressed himself to Johnny and Terrence exclusively. "It was a fantastic choice in the first place. Really fantastic: it's so unnecessary to go all the way to Mexico to find someone to insult you! And after all, already standing, down there below the border, you know, was that caricature he'd done of John D. Rockefeller, Senior: a very blatant sort of thing."

Terrence was wholly surprised, shocked. "Oh! I didn't know that. You mean he'd already—"

"Yes, I mean he'd already! A caricature with about as much subtlety as a wet fish in the face."

And Johnny was shocked, too: that fat old Mexican had made fun of Rockefeller's own *father* beforehand, and then Rockefeller went and hired him anyway! "Only about twenty thousand artists as poor as church mice right here in the United States," he said slowly, sadly. "No call to go all the way down there to get somebody to insult you." Everybody had troubles, he saw; white folks, rich folks, everybody had troubles. And it wasn't really fair, not if Rockefeller was anything like Mr. Morley.

George, storming at him: "What difference would it make if there were fifty thousand artists as poor as church mice? It's really not so important how poor a guy is, you know, Rue; it's a little more to the point how well he can paint!"

And since George could still scare him a little when he shouted like that and looked like that, Johnny didn't see any use in answering.

McNaughton, again in that slow, almost unintelligible, subtly insolent murmur: "There's what's unfortunate about the modern setup. The Pope didn't have to find anyone else; he just said, 'Look at it this way, Mike. Wanna be burned to a crisp?'" He made a gesture, a grimace. "Presto. No more good looking Judas. Not a sore in sight!"

When Johnny and George chortled, Terrence became angry. What was that stupid kid McNaughton doing to the wonderful kind giant who knew ten times as much? His face began to blaze as he spoke: "He took his money, didn't he? He got paid to do some work, didn't he? Then he should have told them what kind of work he was going to do, or he shouldn't've taken their money!"

Surprised indeed, everyone stared at him.

As though he felt something should be said, Johnny Rue commented softly, "Yeah. If somebody *besides* Rockefeller paid him, it wouldn't have been so bad to paint him like that," a statement which caused George to pound a fist on the arm of his chair.

"What difference does it make *who* paid him, Rue? What difference does it *make*? He gave his view of society, didn't he? He did it well, very well, and honestly, and he's the best fresco artist of our day, and so what the devil difference does it make *who pays* him? How can they *do* that? How can they take a man's work and destroy it because he doesn't agree with them? A painting is more than money, a painting if it's good is more than what somebody pays for it in dumb money, in damn' dumb dollar bills!"

His father: "You don't feel, George, that accepting someone's money obligates one not to make a farce of him?"

It was evident to them all that something had happened to the room's atmosphere: its specific gravity of emotion had become palpably more intense. No one answered Mr. Morley. He continued, staring at his son, taking his time with him.

"Does it really tie in well enough with your code of ethics for a man to belittle his employer *on* the employer's time, *with* the employer's equipment, and *in* the employer's own place? And is it also acceptable to your standards for such a betrayal to be perpetrated on the sly, behind closed doors—and then exposed suddenly for the public's amusement? H'm— How do you rate that, truly, George?"

George's face had turned sullen, and he couldn't answer for a moment or two. At last he said in a rough, stubborn voice: "I think a man has the right to paint however he wants."

Terrence, quite emotionally: "That isn't even the point! That isn't even the point! Sure, a man can paint however he wants, sure he should be able to, but in this case he's nothing but a thief! He's a thief for twenty-one thousand dollars, that's all Diego Rivera is! Because that's what he got. Under false pretenses. And I say he should be made to give it back!"

With his air of passionate righteousness, with his voice gone just a trifle high, he seemed ridiculous indeed to George, who—almost automatically, because it was so often his habit—began imitating

him: "‘And I say he should be made to give it ba-ack!’" He was always cruelly hilarious with this trick: he was so large, so powerful, that a certain quality of physical gentleness and delicacy not absurd in Terrence became totally absurd when he caricatured it. He isolated Terrence's most vulnerable aspect and made that aspect seem all there was to Terrence. McNaughton and Johnny Rue laughed involuntarily.

Ordinarily Terrence wouldn't have minded, had long ago learned not to mind; but now he found it excruciating that Mr. Morley should be watching. "Stop it!" he begged; "stop it! Don't do me that way!" Then he bit his lip, realizing how much he had lost.

George went on a bit further with the teasing, not because he wanted to, but only because the plea had come out sounding so miserable it embarrassed him.

Mr. Morley's voice, in a tone he very rarely used, cut the nonsense off then: "I think an apology might be in order, George." His face was stern.

It was the sort of humiliation only children are expected to endure, and George could not believe it was happening to him. When finally he came to accept it, he flushed as red as tile. With no attempt whatever to pretend lightness, he stood up stiffly and made his apology so very deliberately, and in a voice so very clear, that every person in the room understood him: what he said, despite the words, was that he intended to remember the humiliation forever, and that he would forgive it never, or not while he had pride.

When he'd returned to his chair, he announced in a tone of amazing mechanical evenness: "He let the Rockefeller people buy his talent, but he refused to let them buy his spirit—that's about what it comes to. I respect him tremendously. They probably hoped to be able to say afterwards—after the revolution that *has* to come sometime, comes—that they were always sympathetic to the ideas Rivera stands for. But he pushed it further down their throats than they could stand: they wouldn't have minded him putting Marx and Lenin in, the trouble was that he was honest about Rockefeller too."

"H'm. That's a very interesting viewpoint." Mr. Morley lighted a cigar. "Just what ideas *does* Rivera stand for? I'd like to know. Because if Mr. Rockefeller feels the necessity of placating revolutionaries—or at least of being able to, when the great day comes—perhaps

we should get a plan to follow too." His smile was far too heavy for any of them, excepting George, to look at.

"Rivera," but the amazing control had gone now, "has the collectivist point of view, that's what ideas Rivera stands for. He has the collectivist point of view, which is more advanced than the individual, or greed, point of view. Sir."

Mr. Morley's stare could do nothing to George: he had the same eyes, and they returned the stare.

The scene, especially when it occurred to him he'd caused it, gave McNaughton a headache, and therefore he withdrew himself, without moving, from his surroundings. He put one of his hands, those long frail incompetent hands, over his eyes and spoke to no one; and had he been spoken to, would have answered no one.

Desperately, Johnny Rue began telling both George and Mr. Morley—a phrase to the one, a sentence to the other; he'd *force* them together, he'd *make* them be friends again—of how the other day, in the railroad station where his father worked, Barbara Stanwyck had come up with another lady and had asked him a couple of questions, his father, and she'd been awfully nice, and you know she was even better looking, his father said she was even better looking than in the movies? And her voice was really beautiful, really beautiful, his father said.

And since it was past time for them to remember their manners, the Morleys were kind to him, both very interested in Barbara Stanwyck.

Terrence heard nothing and saw very little: he was wrapped warm in delight. The giant hadn't laughed at him and didn't like to see him laughed at. George had been sent away—to some place vague and far away, yet not unlike the Collin home.

Diego Rivera had never been discussed in the Collin home, and indeed only one type of artist ever was: the dramatic kind employed in Hollywood. When Terrence returned home, or at least when his body returned there (his spirit continuing to float far above earth), his mother informed him, with the reverent excitement of the cultist, that one of the very biggest movie companies was going to do a

musical on an "extravagant, lavish, unstinted" budget, and that part of the musical was going to be filmed on the U.C. campus. She pointed out several newspaper columns for him to read.

He read them, but as a superior being; he discovered concealed messages. He examined the columns with a mind almost as scornful as McNaughton's.

In this picture—he saw it artfully promised—more than one hundred dancing girls were to dance, laugh, sing, smile, stimulate the libido, cavort, pretend innocence touchingly, profess consummate sexual skill excitingly, prove the delightfulness of life, and respectfully support the notions that youth endures forever and that beauty must triumph at the end.

Student mobs were to carry (for a scene that surely must have been the climax of the picture) three prototypes on their shoulders: a splendidly handsome hero, a cleanly pretty young heroine, and an endearingly absurd middle-aged college professor. They were to shout—for appearance's sake only, since the shouting would already have been recorded—lusty, spontaneous, happy cheers.

Prospective mob members were advised not to wear much red or black, that more men than women would be needed, and that each individual selected to take part in the big scene was to receive eight dollars per day's work.

The day previous to the shooting had been all proper California sunshine, but the appointed morning was indecisive: first the air bright and still, clean and clear, next a waking sort of breeze, and then the skies lowering with grayness, like a flirt who half-considers tears.

Large crowds gathered on campus—not students merely, but whole families in cars driven so slowly and anxiously as to be scarcely moving, lone men and women climbing the hills on foot, little girls rouged and bleached, and those humble beaten persons consistently and hereditarily poor, and then the half-frantic, the still-defiant who carried themselves smartly and pretended they were there on a lark, "got a kick out of" movies and wanted to see one being made. They comprised something like a fleet of ravening birds, searching sharply against the cold and the darkness. They were fierce and not at all confident birds. Their own numbers appalled them.

The students complained bitterly: this was a college picture, what were these people doing here? Consequent to bitterness, guards were stationed at the campus entrances, and loud-speakers advised the visitors they were not welcome.

Brilliantly casually dressed men from Hollywood indicated to workmen where signs should be placed, and where cords should be strung, and where students might stand in line, and where selected students might stand in line.

McNaughton was as aware as anyone else of the extreme unlikelihood of his being directed to the favored line, but he had come today so as to get Virgil to come: "They'll want you, Benthwick. I'm fairly positive they will. For foreign propaganda purposes, if nothing else. Cashmere sweater, camel's-hair coat, argyles, and that English accent they adore. Then you can take me to dinner at Alioto's and thence to a bordello. I urgently wish to visit a bordello."

"The accent is to show in my profile, or what?"

"In your profile, your bearing, your delicately twitching upper lip."

"On eight dollars we're going to do all that, McNaughton? Both things?"

"Certainly. Easily. No drinks, that's all; just no drinks."

He'd prevailed, and today they stood in line for Hollywood, not the selected line.

Near them, about three or four yards away, Johnny Rue and Robb Nixon stood together. McNaughton had advised them previously: "Remain inseparable. And if a Hollywood gentleman comes near, explain it to him carefully. Kindly. Patiently. Say, 'Here is contrast, drama, paradox, sir. *Épater le bourgeoisie*, sir. We won't mind'; and remember to speak very plainly and slowly, and glance youthfully—for God's sake don't forget to glance youthfully—and keep sweeping out with appealing gestures. Say, 'We won't mind being handled either with comedy or compassion, or as Nature's vagary: the multi-foiate rose—or to be cut from the rushes later, or *pour épater les communistes*. We'd be especially good for that, for épateeing Communists, but use us how you will, sir!' Say, 'Sixteen dollars.'" And he'd even shown them how to bow slightly, glancing youthfully. He'd smiled at them warmly, his hopes really quite high. "Keep away from everyone else, including us. You've got to stick out; show. Each of you can give me a dollar if it works."

"It won't work, McNaughton," Virgil had protested. "I'd wager everything I own it won't work. It would be impolitic."

Virgil's caution had been resented at the time. Today, as it began to look as though he'd probably been right, it was resented anew. His idea had been that Terrence Collin made the most likely choice, and he'd therefore proposed lending Terrence one of his handsome sports jackets—but McNaughton had intervened: "Absolutely no chance if he's dressed decently, Benthwick. It would mean unfair competition for the male lead."

"But our own dear boy won't even be made up, and their lead will be!"

"Never mind. Perfection of pallor," McNaughton had shaken his head. "Our own dear boy's classic perfection of pallor: too much."

So today Terrence stood by himself, dressed in his own clothes, and wishing he might stand either with Robb and Johnny or else with the other two. But McNaughton had ordered that he "remain cleanly apart." A couple of girls kept trying to flirt with him, and though he enjoyed their attentions, they made him uneasy: he tried, but could think of nothing to say to them. He kept wishing they could see him in one of Virgil's jackets, regardless of what that bossy kid McNaughton said.

Johnny Rue was the first to be hired; in fact quite suddenly found himself hired: an arrogant, paunchy third-assistant-director ordered him in kind condescension, "Go fill this thermos half with warm milk and half with hot coffee, will you, boy? Not cream now. Hear?"

"Yassuh!" Johnny answered before he had time to think. He sped away with the bottle, imagining himself to have triumphed somehow. Robb flushed scarlet for him.

McNaughton and Virgil stared coldly. Virgil's voice went very British: "Well, there's the first rotten thing to happen today."

"Perhaps he'll not mind."

"The only Negro in the line? Come, McNaughton, of course he'll mind! If not today, tomorrow."

"Yes. You're right— Of course he will. We'd better take the money away from him, I suppose. At least that will be something: balm for the sting."

Yet when he returned and was given a dollar tip, and waved it in their direction, still grinning, they could not carry out their kindness.

His eagerness had affronted them: they could not identify themselves with that, and so withdrew from him. They pretended not to have seen what happened.

He felt let down, though not yet embarrassed. Robb postponed that moment for him with, "Come on, Rue, get your damn' back into it! We're falling way behind on that épateeing stuff!"

Terrence, meanwhile, was obviously gaining favor with an extremely important man, a man so important he wore a blue duck-bill cap and never once glanced to see if his secretaries were near, but instead merely dictated orders straight ahead, sure they'd be captured from behind. He liked Terrence's looks, obviously, but was just as obviously irritated by something else about him.

The puzzle of his irritation was so easy to solve that Virgil had already begun to take off his camel's-hair coat to throw it to their own dear boy, and McNaughton was crossly muttering apologies for having been wrong, when Robb came dashing up to Terrence and exchanged jackets with him. The plan succeeded right away: one of the secretaries brusquely ordered Terrence to the hiring line.

Next, the duck-billed man himself paused and inquired of Virgil, "Don't you wear glasses? That's a pity: we might use you, if you had a pair of glasses." And immediately Robb, signaled to, dashed helpfully again, because he was their only wearer of glasses. His were strong lenses—he couldn't see without them, nor Virgil with them; both, as regretfully as silently, realized they'd have headaches. But success again: no sooner had Robb, looking less and less like himself, returned to stand by Johnny, than Virgil too was motioned toward the line of the chosen.

Not much later, someone called out officially that all who would be needed had been hired; those who'd missed employment were urged to vacate the area. McNaughton and Robb and Johnny lingered, curious to see what use would be made of Terrence and Virgil. A guard became officious. They ignored him. He began shouting, even threatening; offered to give them a push. So they retreated, went down the hill slowly, at first looking back once or twice over their shoulders, in silence.

Their mood became heavy, somber. Robb walked between the others, kept one hand on Johnny's sleeve, the other on McNaughton's; he wondered if he might ever go blind. Someday Japan might conquer

the United States; some soldier, not liking albinos, might smash his glasses; no more could be made for Caucasians, and gradually he'd go blind. He entertained himself by wondering if he could ever learn to carve, to sculpt, sightless.

Hundreds of students, as rejected as they, surged round them, for the most part passing them. The birds were still fierce, still ravening; their number had lessened, but only their number: their need had increased.

Johnny began, just now, to feel the shame of that quick "*Yassuh!*" and the shame of his running, and of waving that dollar bill. He saw now why McNaughton and Virgil had ignored him. He felt half-sick with embarrassment. That was a nigger trick, he had done a real nigger trick, and they didn't think of him that way, he knew they didn't think of him like that, he should have told the fat bastard to go to hell. He could treat them to some coffee or something. He thought of doing that. But it was so risky: the waiter might take too long, or they might not really want to go in with him, or somebody might say something about them, or of course they might be just out-and-out refused. And besides, it was the same dollar—

Suddenly McNaughton saw them, the three of them, with hateful clarity in his mind's eye: he saw Robb in the tattered jacket, Robb blinking, a trifle blind as he himself was a trifle lame, holding on to them; saw Johnny sullen, his mouth pushed out, his face pinched, more apelike, less human, a monkey in a pout. And himself—McNaughton saw himself, in an excruciating moment without self-love.

Then the flashing, clever car, George's Chrysler swerving to the curb at sight of them.

A couple of doors thrown open, George shouting, "Hi, Gable! Hi, Crosby! Who's that with you, Paul Robeson? What's the matter? Didn't you land a contract? Get in! Quite a fancy blazer you've got there, Nixon! Get in, get in!"

They climbed into his car, Johnny in the front seat, the other two in back. Their silence would have enveloped him straightway except that he fought it off; he himself was depressed enough by the day to be determined to be cheerful.

He acknowledged that he also had gone job-hunting; he had stood in line too, had been passed over too. He told them about it and plainly expected a reaction different from the one he received.

"Why? Why did you want to come, Morley?" McNaughton asked coldly. He felt it indecent of George to have come; callously unfair. A line, "To pick a pimple on the face of Poverty?" went through his mind.

George started to say, "For the same reason you came, I suppose," but saw the error just in time. He started to say, "I've never seen 'em make a movie, and I thought it would be fun," but there was no fun on their faces today. He started to say, "I guess I have as much right as you to come," but realized he did not. He said, "For Christ's sake, for Christ's *sake*, what's wrong with you guys? McNaughton, what's biting you? McNaughton?"

McNaughton looked out the window; he plainly had no intention of answering.

As for Johnny, he was silent too, wondering miserably what Mr. Morley would have thought if he could have seen him "*Yassuh!*" and then run, run—after shaking hands with him that day, and all.

Robb Nixon's headache had begun, but still he was the only one whom kindness found. He answered George conversationally, "Maybe he just means you're working too hard at being democratic or something, Morley, but—God! let's be tolerant: we can't *all* be poor. Hey, our own dear boy got taken on, wouldn't you know it? And Benthwick too, old Virg made the grade too. I'm magic: whoever borrows anything from me gets a job."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. I lent Benthwick my glasses. Collin got my coat. Incidentally, I'm blind as hell."

And he was the only one to let George take him all the way home; McNaughton and Johnny made excuses and got out at different turning points.

Johnny got out at Adeline and 40th and walked on the tracks to the Santa Fe station at San Pablo Street, three blocks away, and waited until he saw a friend of his father's on duty at the baggage room.

Then he went up to the friend, a white man, and said, "Good afternoon, sir," in a soft voice. He walked up to the man carefully, not shuffling along, and not beating his heels down hard to make them advertise. His father always said, "A colored boy should have—fact is, he's *gotta* have—the best walk in the world! And I don't mean no strut, I mean *walk*. Walk easy, Johnny"; so Johnny walked *easy* and spoke in a soft voice to the white man.

The white man smiled and his expression said he liked him. He waved him on, permitting him to go into the baggage agent's side through the swinging gate; and then for a joke, since it was a quiet day, just as Johnny was through the gate, he growled, "*Hey, you! Where do you think you're goin'?*"

When Johnny whirled around, he grinned and threw him an apple. Johnny caught it, stretched his lips hard for thanks, and walked on. His stomach and bowels and heart and glands were over the scare in just a minute or two.

His father had said this fellow was usually a pretty good guy, except just for one thing: he didn't like colored to go to college; he'd never gone, and his own kids didn't go, and though he didn't have anything against colored he just didn't like them to go to college. "Not the only one," his father had said, shaking his head—he never got excited. "He's not the only one down there like that." So Johnny had really wondered what was up, for a minute, though of course he'd been hoping it was a joke. Whether his father had told this fellow about his going to college Johnny couldn't remember; he couldn't remember whether he'd found out in time.

He sat on the porters' bench and waited.

He saw his father first, before he himself was seen, and the light chanced to be cruel: Mr. Rue looked old and thin to the point of unfamiliarity. His veins, at the temples, were always prominent, but this afternoon they appeared elevated above the skin and at least a quarter of an inch wide. The blood showed itself, coursing. For some time his hair had been going to a streaked silver, but today it surprised Johnny: he'd not thought one half so much had turned. He'd known the heavy lines about the mouth slanted down, and also that there were hollows below the cheekbones, yet he'd thought it a head to suggest strength and good humor, or, at the least, patience; this

afternoon, with the station's light so hard, he saw only fatigue, discouragement, and a hopeless, conquered humility. Even the shoulders hurt Johnny: they weren't supposed to slope so much.

Without knowing that he was moving, Johnny rose and went to him very quickly.

After the first sharp glance that asked if everything were all right or if this visit meant some sort of trouble, Mr. Rue smiled delightedly. Whenever he saw Johnny for the first time in a day, his eyes made the sort of pleased, surprised investigation they did now.

"What's up, you ol' scalawag?" he demanded, his voice a reassuring croon. "You come to bum some money? Is that the honor of the occasion?" He clapped him on the arm—clapped jauntily with the same hand that had just carefully deposited a ten-cent tip in his uniform pocket; but he was taller now, at least an inch or two taller.

"I don't want none of your lousy money," Johnny grinned—and felt the compliment of what he'd just seen happen so keenly that he wanted to laugh.

"Well, man-boy, I declare *that's* a nice surprise!"

It was almost time for Mr. Rue's workday to be over. They talked a little while, sitting on the porters' bench, and then he went inside to sign out. He changed from his uniform to soft clothes that could be washed. In a few minutes he met his son on the street.

As they began to walk home, Johnny pulled the dollar from his pocket, and, showing it, explained, "I played flunkey to a big slob from Hollywood today, Pop. For this. Ran and got him his warmed-up cow-juice."

"Warmed-up cow-juice! What's the matter? He got him some ulcers?"

"'Spect he did. Looked like it."

A little beer parlor (passionately denounced by Mrs. Rue) had recently—and rather timidly, Prohibition not six months repealed—opened in the neighborhood between the station and their home; Johnny suggested now, adult as a king, "How 'bout us stoppin' in at the Imperial for a beer?"

"Burnin' a hole in your pocket?"

"Got anything burnin' a hole in yours?"

His father gave a chuckle for that; and admitted defeat, even admitted he was thirsty.

The café they entered had no proper storage room, because a hill came pushing up where there should have been a storage room, but one side was partitioned off with a huge orange-and-green checked oilcloth so that supplies of all sorts (cleaning supplies, beer, brass knuckles, dice and a wheel, contraceptives, salves, a large devil's head so powerful it had once killed off an entire family, and a Protestant hymnbook) might be kept from the public view. The orange of the cloth was the color of dying carrots, and the green was ugly with black: Johnny sat so as not to have to look in that direction. Instead, he faced a large, proud, faded photograph of Jack Johnson crouched, ready for boxing.

They were very easy with the beer (alcoholic content: 3.2 per cent) for it was automatically understood between them that it wouldn't be followed by another. Yet, since they were hungry, just the one glass relaxed them a little.

Their mood was pleasant, and Johnny felt unwilling to change it. But he felt more unwilling not to be comforted, and there was no one who could comfort him except his father. He began: "Hey, a funny thing. Today they were shooting this movie on campus. Big mob scene, y'know? And they picked the ones they wanted. They didn't pick me, which was O.K. because a lot of them, naturally, they didn't. I was the only colored in a whole big section. . . ."

He seemed to lose the impetus for talking. He saw he couldn't get all the feelings across, he didn't have words for all the feelings, and the incident by itself wasn't interesting enough to talk about—not even to his father who could make nearly anything interesting by just the way he listened.

"Ain't you mostly?"

"Yeah. Yeah, but—"

"But what?"

"Well, I mean, this guy. He told *me* to go get him his lousy milk. Milk an' coffee."

"So what? So what if he did?"

"Well— In a way I sort of wish I hadn't've."

"So now you wouldn't have the dollar and I wouldn't have the beer?"

He glanced up quickly, aghast. "Pop! You don't *ever* look at things like that!"

"Johnny, Johnny, I was only kiddin'! Doan' take ever'thing so serious!"

Yet the boy refused to smile, to be teased. If his father wouldn't understand, he just wouldn't, that was all there was to that. But he'd be damned if he'd pretend he hadn't been trying to say something.

Mr. Rue sighed. It wasn't supposed to be this way—it was supposed to be just the opposite—but he'd learned a long time ago how it really went: the younger you were the more serious it seemed, anything, anything at all.

Reluctantly, he took up the heaviness of admitting he'd understood: "What'd it've changed? If you tol' him to go soak his head? What good'd that do?"

Johnny felt too grateful to acknowledge how much he'd wanted understanding. "Hell, I don't care. It don't matter." He looked around the room, to show he didn't care. The orange-and-green checks caught him, hurt him. "I'd like to kick his ass in!"

"That kinda talk don't help *nothin'*!"

The beer was almost gone. At precisely the same moment, they took their next-to-the-last swallows.

Mr. Rue scratched himself, meditatively. He and his wife had never agreed about what to do when the children, Johnny and his older sister, had had nightmares. Mrs. Rue used to say, "Let them sleep it out!" but he had always awakened them, held them, told them what they were seeing wasn't true. Next week, Johnny'd be twenty years old, and what he saw was true; but the time seemed wrong for stopping.

He spoke humbly, his eyes and voice directed to the glass: "That man was used to *me*, Johnny. An' thousands jus' like me. You tellin' him you wouldn't go for his milk wouldn't make him think you was any diff'rent. Jus' a smart-aleck nigger with enough spendin' money for once, that's all what he'd think of you then."

Johnny's eyes went hot with rage: his father was better than the man from Hollywood, a hundred times, a million times better.

"Jus' simply ain't the right way for it. What ya gotta do, Johnny, is to *show* 'em. In some other way, or like in all little ways. Take for example, like your Ma's always tryin' to— Oh, yes, she *is*, Johnny! Give a li'l credit! Sure: them geraniums in the window box, ever'thing clean as a whistle, the rent right on the dot, no cursin' and drinkin' in the house. . . ."

"Oh, Pop! Who knows that? Who's to see? Who comes in the house?"

"Ne'mine. You's clean when you goes out of it. And you learnt how to act. So it 'mounts to the same thing."

But Johnny's sister had borne an illegitimate child. Just as they'd both reminded themselves a moment before that they must chew leaves or berries on the way home, so now they remembered Archie silently.

"If folks like us, like your Ma an' me, can do little ways and that's all they can do, why, that's fine, to do 'em, but if folks get to where they can do somethin' or other real big, why, nat'rally," he made a brushing gesture, to be excused for lecturing, "why—" He couldn't think how to finish.

They swallowed the rest of their beer and walked away from the place rather hurriedly: Mrs. Rue had a thousand busybodies always on the lookout.

After a bit, Mr. Rue began, slowly and with great pleasure, intoning his own litany, fixing the stars in his own heaven: "Johnny, see what I mean. See, like Marian Anderson, Paul Robeson, Ethel Waters, them folks in that show in New York, George Washington Carver, Booker T. Washington."

"Or like Walter White."

"Yeah, *now* you're talkin'!"

They heard a quick identical pounding in their brains: *You be one someday! You be or! Johnny Rue!*

"So you think it was O.K.? Like I *should've* done that and I *should've* taken it?"

"Sure I do, yes, sure indeed I do! Look at it like: when I was your age, you think I could've got to *be* there, to *be* sent?"

"I—I acted kind of silly, though, Pop, afterwards. See? I acted like I thought it was real swell."

"That's jus' self-conscious. You got to be some; but doan' be any more than you got to. *Doan'!*" He was thinking of his wife: "It can take all the fun out of—ever't'ing! Of even *bein'!* Even *breathin'!*"

When they were about a block from home, Johnny felt such a rioting of love, such a hot surge of love for his father, that at the peak of it he burst out passionately: "If I ever get to be anything, if I ever get to 'mount to anything, Pop, well, I swear that anything I get, like a car or a watch or a real good suit of clothes, or *anything*,

you're gonna get one too, before I get mine! I *swear* it now, hear?"

There was something so comical about him—about his earnestness, his flashing eyes, his full begging lips—that Mr. Rue had to shift himself into an almost painfully tight control so as not to laugh aloud.

He looked straight ahead, and answered soberly: "Not surprisin'. I 'spect you will." On the instant, he was caught in the same mood precisely; saw nothing at all to laugh at. "After all, we been givin' each other things for years an' years, Johnny-boy. I been givin' you a biscuit an' a bed, an' you been givin' me, well—well, you."

Suddenly they were both deeply embarrassed, and would not have said another word, even if they'd had to walk a mile or more together.

But they were home. Mrs. Rue suspected them of having stopped off for a glass of beer (maybe the Lord would forgive Mr. Roosevelt, and then again maybe He wouldn't), and stated her suspicion plainly, though only with her eyes. Indeed, by the very way she opened the door to them, she indicated that company was in the house and manners and harmony on display.

When they saw who it was—her important brother—Mr. Rue grew as humble as he'd been in the station, and as quiet as he was humble. Even Johnny became heavily respectful. Mrs. Rue's brother was now and had been for many years head elevator man in one of the largest buildings in San Francisco. He was permitted to hire and to fire his own underlings. He wrote reports. He made suggestions to the management. He'd been interviewed for an article in *Crisis*. In their entire circle of acquaintances, the Rues did not know a Negro more exalted.

He had brought with him tonight his wife, an awed little mouse of a woman, and her niece, an orphan just come to them from Harlem.

He rose and greeted them gravely. He shook hands with them heartily, as if welcoming them to their home.

He and his sister introduced the orphan at the same moment ("This is Gladys!") and in much the same voice—an enthusiastic "Bless the Lord!" tone, and their faces shone with the praiseworthiness of his having taken her in.

She was a girl only a year or two younger than Johnny; decidedly haughty and tall, with "straight" hair worn in the page-boy style.

When Mr. Rue said the standard courteous things to her, she replied with extreme self-possession, but very quietly.

Johnny said nothing; instead, he studied her, section by section. Starting with the feet, he was on his guard before the knees: he admitted that here were attributes not usually found among colored girls. Yet if the high arches and well-fleshed calves were interesting to him, he nevertheless drew the line at letting himself become excited, experience having taught him that legs as good as these usually gave their owners intolerable conceit. Besides, he could tell by the way she'd crossed her knees and draped her skirt that they'd been appreciated before. She was long-waisted and held herself erect, almost as if with some sort of defiance. Her breasts were small, pert; he guessed them firm almost to the point of hardness. But her neck changed the course of his imagining—he found it unfortunately long, even stretched-looking, the very sort of neck he liked least. On the other hand, her complexion was the very sort he liked most: coffee with cream, and flawlessly smooth. He was wanting to see her smile when she flashed a smile at him, and then he didn't want to see her smile again. Her teeth were good, but the smile said she'd been reading his thoughts, moment by moment, section by section, and she'd decided he was quite funny. It also said no.

Johnny's skin was the very dark brown, though not the blue-black sort; it grew even darker as he looked away. With no small effort, he affected an expression of disgust, superiority, boredom. He told himself he didn't like her name; Gladys sounded like a whore's name to him. He began listening to the conversation.

His mother's brother was happily telling about what a terrible day he had had. One of his elevator men—he called them "my boys"—had gone hysterical, no one knew why. (Johnny said, "Claustrophobia," to show he knew the word. Everyone except Gladys looked impressed.) There'd been two lost children in the morning, and four (one of them obviously unwanted) in the afternoon; he'd had to call the police several times. And a woman had lost her purse with twenty-five dollars in it, and one of his boys had found the purse, but, because it didn't have the twenty-five dollars in it, was terrified of reporting it until he—he himself, Mrs. Rue's brother—had agreed to vouch for the man's long-standing and spotless honesty.

He was as pompous as a hotel clerk, as gravely important as a

school principal. He complained of how difficult it was to chart working schedules and vacation schedules for so many boys—of whom he apparently had dozens.

The two women listened respectfully to every word he said; and Mr. Rue listened humbly; and Johnny as man to man, since he, after all, was attending college. But Gladys looked at her nails, and her expression seemed to say she wished she were deaf.

They had dinner: pork chops with applesauce, wilted lettuce, cornbread and honey, even chicory coffee. Everyone (except Archie, who fed himself in the kitchen, there being no room for a seventh at table) ate very carefully.

After dinner, Mr. Rue slipped a half dollar into Johnny's hand and whispered that he should take Gladys to the roller-skating rink nearby.

"Pop! I got *studying* to do! Criminy! The *one* night of the week I don't have to work at the bowling alley!" She wouldn't go with him. She'd smile like that again, and say no, thank you.

"Don't have to be gone long. You do like I say."

"But, Pop, she's— I don't even *like* her!"

"You be nice to her, I'm tellin' you. For just 'bout one hour, hear? Won't kill you."

"Aw, she wouldn't go, anyway, Pop. She's a snot."

"Don't give me a lot of lip now, boy. Can't you see the poor kid's scared to death?"

"Scared?" His voice cracked with incredulity. "Her, scared?"

"She so scared she's trembly as jelly. Inside herself. Shoot your eyes, boy, don't you know she got nobody, Johnny! She got *nobody*!"

Suddenly, indeed instantly, Johnny's mood changed. The girl became completely unimportant. The only thing that mattered was his swift conviction: If he were nice to her, very, very nice to her, if he held her elbow at the rink and didn't let her fall, and didn't make passes at her, or not too many, the gods would not cut around him with their shears as they'd done with her; the gods would let his father live forever, or at least for a long, long time.

She accepted the invitation as though she thought him funnier than ever.

After a minute or two of their silent walk to the rink, she asked him if he liked California. Realizing that he should have been the one

to ask if *she* liked California, he answered sullenly that he supposed one place was as good as another. Her comment was, "No. I'd hardly say that. But I guess you can get used to anything. Even these God-awful palm trees."

During the rest of the walk, he amused himself by calling her rather worse than a snot, silently, over and over again. Admission would cost him thirty cents; and he'd be damned if he'd spend the remaining twenty on her.

It appalled him that he enjoyed putting on her skates for her.

Then, to his relief, the rolling music of the rink beat round them too loud for talking.

But since she hadn't skated before, she had to lean on him sometimes; at least their bodies became politely acquainted. He admitted he liked her scent.

When she said she was tired and he helped her to a bench for a rest, something about her—he couldn't have described whatever it was—convinced him quite suddenly that his father was right: she *was* scared, possibly even "trembly as jelly."

About to feel kindly toward her, nearly protective, he asked if she'd like him to get her a drink of water. And was completely astonished at her answer: a slight poke in the ribs and the rude, mischievous drawl: "Piker! Whyn't you make it coffee? You still got twenty cents: I saw 'em. Let's live reckless, boy! It's only a nickel!"

He glared at her ferociously; yet at the same time admired her for giving him back his kindness on a cracked platter. He told himself his father was still right; but she had a lot of courage, too. "Everybody's manners that bad in Harlem?"

She laughed, louder than the music. "O.K., sonny." Mocking him with steady, bright eyes, she drew a dime from her pocket. "Heads?"

He raped her, rather thoroughly. Or, no; instead he saw she worked in a cat-house too low for him to frequent. Furiously, he went to fetch the coffee, and resolved while bringing it back that the remaining ten cents of his father's half dollar would be a kind of touchstone. If she succeeded in getting that away from him, too, he was some poor ignoramus in the South, miserable with tapeworm.

"Lucky I don't take cream and sugar, isn't it?"

But he had no more than comfortably settled to a resolved, controlled dislike for her than she changed herself again. She touched

him on the knee lightly—not seductively, but instead as if he were an old privileged friend. “Please don’t tell your dad I acted so bad, Johnny. He was real nice. He’s the one made you take me, wasn’t he?”

Mercifully, he was excused from answering: two of his acquaintances from U.C., one darker than he and one as light as Gladys, skated over to them and began asking half-hearted questions about an impending examination. Answering distantly, he pretended not to notice that their interest wasn’t really in the examination.

She pretended nothing of the sort, however, and was soon carrying on a spirited flirtation with them both at once. She said her name was Daphne Dear and that she was touring the U.S., gathering material for the Amos ’n’ Andy radio program. Quite seriously, she was offered their unlimited cooperation.

They weren’t really friends of his at all, but Johnny felt infuriated for their deception. He had his mouth opened and ready with the angry truth when she interrupted by rising unsteadily and asking if he’d please teach her just a little more: she really thought she was beginning to learn this skating stuff.

He held her elbow, but reprimandingly.

After a while she turned her head to him and asked in a tone just loud enough to overcome the music, “This is a funny thing for me, Johnny. I mean it’s funny-peculiar.”

He wouldn’t ask her what she was talking about.

“I mean, I just never been related to anybody before that went to college, before you. So, like when those guys came up, well, I had to fool ’em a while or something.”

This time he refused even to look at her; he stared straight ahead. Her breasts were little pyramids. But there’d be no way she could ever make him friendly to her again.

It took two or three minutes for the flattery of the thing to get to him.

When they left the skating circle again, he asked her at the refreshment stand if she’d like a candy bar. For the first time, she looked surprised. Possibly even embarrassed. She said she’d like half a bar only, if they could split one. What kind did he like?

They sat down as far away from the music as possible and unwrapped the candy, divided it. He assured himself he was only putting her at ease, but he began to talk volubly—and, against his

every wish, almost as importantly as his uncle. "I major in Education. And the reason is, it's just because my ma would have a fit if I didn't. She wants me to be a teacher. Art is just my minor, but Art's the only thing I care about. She's right though, I know she's right. You got to train to be a teacher or something. Not that it does any good. But it might."

When she spoke it was in a different voice, not the sophisticated one she'd used till now. "Why couldn't you teach Art? Not to kids, but just to artists. Like real Art? A man that used to live upstairs from us in Harlem went to a class in night school. A real Magazine Story Illustration class, twice a week. I mean like that."

He smiled, old and tolerant in a condescending sort of way: McNaughton to the life. He explained at length just what one must have "in" him in order to be taught, and that there weren't enough people with anything "in" them to fill the art schools. He repeated things he'd heard George say about art schools, he repeated things he'd heard McNaughton say about the "stified, stifling poseurs from the academies." When he noticed that she'd become so interested she licked the chocolate from her fingers without the slightest self-consciousness, though staring at him all the while, he even felt confident enough to attack the entire field of magazine story illustration itself. "That kind of thing is like soggy tapioca pudding, Gladys. See? The stories are all mush, and then they hire painters to dress up the mush with sticky meringue. And they're just prostitutes anyway—the ones who'll do that for money, they're just lousy slick hacks, and they'll do whatever anybody tells 'em. That isn't Art, see? Real Art, I mean." Her glance felt like warm sunshine on him. But when he told her that really good artists were usually starving poor nowadays, her eyes abruptly lacked the proper respect.

She stared moodily at the skaters. At last: "Anyway, you're lucky. You got *one* thing you want to do."

He thought about that. "Be luckier if it made a livin'."

Solemnly, contemptuously: "Lots of folks can make a livin'."

"True. And a lot can't. A fact which you can't say alters to help me."

"What I mean, Johnny: lots of folks can make a livin', right? One way or another. But not so many has one thing they really want to *do*."

Her teeth were even more regular than he'd thought.

"What people needs, mostly, is some *one thing*. Most people never in their whole lives has a—" At first she couldn't remember the term, but was finally triumphant; with a large swift gesture: "Most people's life never gets a *focal point*!"

Ducking just in time, he granted the truth of her observation, that in so much he was superior. He began doing a head of her, in his mind. He wanted to know if her own life had a focal point, but decided it might be rude to ask, because it probably didn't. Then he decided it might be rude not to ask, because it probably did.

"All I've got now is a temporary focal point."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah! To get myself out once and for all from under that pukey Christly uncle!"

Shocked, he looked away: all his life he'd been taught to revere that same uncle. But after a moment or so the defiance and passion of her spirit reached him, and he looked at her and chuckled. A good thing he'd decided not to get fresh, probably: she'd been flirty with the U.C. boys, but she was the kind of girl might poke you in the eye. He granted that her chin was strong. He put his finger under it—it wasn't too strong—and chuckled again.

"What you laughin' at?" she demanded belligerently.

"I doan' know." His laugh turned into a giggle; he withdrew.

On the way home, he showed her the bowling alley where he worked in the evenings.

She fell into what appeared an irritable silence, then broke out: "You supposed to do that? Things like that? The man lived upstairs from us in Harlem wouldn't do *anything*. He wouldn't even clean out the bathtub! He said it hurt the way he held a brush!"

Johnny chortled.

"Well?" She seemed confused, almost annoyed. "Is that right or not? You s'posed to, or aren't you s'posed to?"

"Well. No. No, I guess really. I mean, the ideal is: not to."

"I wouldn't do it, then. I wouldn' do it at all!"

"So you wouldn't have any money to buy books or go to college?"

"To be a teacher when all I want to do is paint? Real Art? No. No, I wouldn't!"

The criticism stung him sharply. Who was she, a little nobody of an orphan, to tell him what to do? "Well, Jeez!"

They stopped their walking to stare at each other angrily, their faces illuminated by a street lamp. It occurred to him his mother would say she didn't know her place. He agreed. "Don't you think you're somebody great, though?" he sneered.

Her eyes spat back at him: "Yeah—by God! I do!"

Perhaps as much as ten seconds went by while the hot gaze held.

Then for the second time her spirit suddenly delighted him: he wanted to have part of it for himself so much that he'd have seized her if he dared. Instead, the mutter, in a voice half-choked with harshness: "Please kiss me."

She appeared to debate the matter for a moment, then pressed forward—they were of a height—and kissed him fiercely, not in the way of caressing him, but instead as if she were punishing him, a hard kiss on the mouth. At the next moment she was staring at him again, but as if trying to read him now. She questioned half-brutally, "Johnny, you tell me: you paint any good? I mean you *real* good at it? Or not?"

He felt next to frightened—she seemed odd to him, and as if she were much older than he. And he had to say yes or no: she kept staring at him. If he answered yes, he might never paint really well; if he answered no, he certainly shouldn't. He licked his lips, and nodded. "I do. I am. I'm pretty good, Gladys. McNaughton and some guys, white guys—they're friends of mine, and they really know a lot of things—they think I'm—good, Gladys."

"O.K., then." She took his arm possessively and held it firmly as they continued walking home.

He had the feeling that something critical, something extremely adult had happened. He was very quiet for days.

For hours, for almost all the evening, Virgil Benthwick and Marion McNaughton had been very quiet. They were working in Virgil's small bed-sitting room, McNaughton at the desk, Virgil at his easel.

The Sire was in his own room, reading Plato. Mrs. Benthwick and the wood-loving bat, and the landlady who was wife to the wood-loving bat, were all three away on a trip to New York: brain specialists were being consulted and cowboy story publishers changed. Mrs. Mc-

Naughton had to attend a lecture illustrated by many slides and given by a library colleague she detested impotently.

McNaughton sat grading freshman themes for Professor Etienne, while Virgil diligently copied Sir Joshua Reynolds' "Jane, Countess of Harrington." They'd visited the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery in San Marino (through courtesy of George Morley III) just the weekend before, and Virgil had studied the painting with such absorption then that he copied it more from memory now than from the small reproduction before him. He worked intently, contentedly.

McNaughton at last grew a trifle restless; rose, went to the window and looked out at the night. He slipped into a muttering tirade: "In this country, generation after generation! They were in this country a really long time, Benthwick. Came over the first boatload or so, a whole wretched flock of McNaughtons! You imagine *one* of 'em had the enterprise to turn himself into a Robber Baron? Railroads, land? Why, they didn't know the meaning of the words! . . . Just muling ministers, that's all the sense they had to turn themselves into!"

It took Virgil at least a quarter-minute to understand from this complaint that McNaughton was comparing, unfavorably, his own ancestors with Mr. Henry E. Huntington's. When he did, he sympathized: "Hard lines, old man, hard lines!"

McNaughton limped around the room. "Do you know how I got my limp? I ever tell you?"

Virgil, not looking up: "No. Can't say I even notice you've got one any more. I didn't notice much in the beginning. It's not—"

"Oh, don't be wall-eyed. 'It is too early to sing and dance at funerals.' Then let it remain my secret." He came closer, hesitated: "All right to look now, Benthwick?"

"*Oui.*" Virgil sat back and rested.

McNaughton examined the Countess of Harrington minutely, without a word. At last: "You know what's the only unquestionably correct religious tenet I've ever come across?"

"Let me think. The Virgin Birth?"

"The rack, the rack, break his back upon the rack! Bring the jack to break his back upon the rack!—Not quite. No, glumly (I'm going to say glumly after this instead of seriously), the only unquestionably correct religious tenet I've ever come across is that painters are supernatural."

Virgil bowed, pleased.

"Never mind grinning like some monstrous canary-stuffed Cheshire: no one's flattering you." He drew a cigarette from the pack he carried, lighted it, threw the pack to Virgil. "No, glumly: it's clearly magic. I see the lady. I see her perfectly. But to save my heart from a cannibal's frying pan I couldn't do anything like what you're doing. If you go wrong, I'd certainly be able to tell you—"

"And wouldn't be above it."

"And wouldn't be above it, but to *do* it! Even if I were *in* there, looking at her, I couldn't. And as I'm sure there's nothing wrong with me, there must be something wrong with you. Therefore: supernatural. Devil's child."

"Save my heart from a cannibal's frying pan.' That's not bad. Maybe I couldn't do that."

"My wit is superior to yours, of course, but only slightly. Only very slightly, I'm afraid."

"Well, let's sob. Anyway, wasn't that just for prehistoric man, thinking painters supernatural?"

A brooding silence; then haughtily: "Sometimes you sound as hopelessly ignorant as Rue or Collin, I swear you do, Benthwick. 'Prehistoric' means 'before history.' 'History' means the 'record of.'"

"I thank you so utterly. But it's just as amazing to us, of course, the whole affair: why someone intelligent—even someone of just average intelligence, let alone someone of your caliber—should think he can't draw."

"Now don't start that again. We don't think we can't; we can't."

"It's just a block. You're just frightened of something."

McNaughton merely scowled.

"Truly. Listen: I can feel the same thing in myself. I can copy anything, *any* picture—as you know—easily, pretty accurately. I'm with the best of them, on that?" He paused, wanting confirmation.

McNaughton nodded: "You really are simply astonishing, on that."

"I am, really. But sometimes—not all the time, thank God—an odd thing happens, a sort of prohibition from the inside, when I try something entirely—on my own. An odd thing happens, especially if it's rather complicated subject matter. You know? If it's something I can't persuade myself I'm just copying from the original in nature. And whenever I can't fight that feeling off, I'm done for."

"Entirely different. A block is a block is a block. But a pose is just

a pose. What possible connection is there between that condition and the case of someone who simply can *not* draw?"

"You *can* draw. Everybody can draw. You can draw any recognizable object, so it is recognizable. Anybody can."

McNaughton waved his hand, to show he'd not discuss it.

"The block that makes you think you can't is exactly the same, only different in degree, as the block that happens to me when—"

"Nonsense. You're lazy, Benthwick. That's the only trouble with you. You're always being told you've more technical skill than anyone. In life drawing classes and so on. And it's just easier to use that skill for a safe result, a safe fine showy result. It's too much trouble to hack out something of your own. So you call it a block."

Virgil strengthened a line, was quiet for a moment. "You may have a point. Except I'll not swallow that about my being lazy. At least I've never *seemed* lazy—to me."

They were quiet again. When McNaughton spoke, it was with a puzzled air. "You're not, Benthwick. You're not lazy. In fact, you're one of the least lazy people I know. So what in the name of the crucified Saviour is wrong with you?" For suddenly it was true: he'd seen it before, many times, in Virgil, but had never quite admitted it—an astounding skill at reproducing, a heavy reluctance to create. "Dead man, dead man standing on a wall," he muttered.

"Yes. Y'know, I can remember it clearly: I was dead before I was born."

"And did they never say to you: 'Do you want to be born, to come alive?'"

"They did. And I said, 'Only if I can always be dead at the same time.'"

"I see. Was your reason a repugnance toward the acts of bleeding and of shedding tears?"

"That was my reason among others. Therefore I added the stipulation that if ever I were to weep it would have to be in pearls."

"Real pearls?"

"No, not real pearls. Real pearls were reserved for the Prince of Wales who felt much the same way I did about things but was a real sport."

"*Noblesse oblige?*"

"Largely."

They were so pleased with this conversation that they maintained a perfect silence after it for two or three minutes.

McNaughton looked again at the reproduction Virgil was using for a guide, "Jane, Countess of Harrington." Suddenly he burst out irritably: "Her majesty! Her ridiculous bribing majesty!"

Virgil looked up at him sharply. "'Ridiculous' is intolerant. Surprisingly intolerant, coming from you. But 'bribing'? Why bribing, McNaughton?"

"Of course it was bribing. She gave and her class gave, and Gainsborough and Lawrence and that whole pack accepted, bribes. A dinner invitation here, a good word about being knighted there. It's the thing I've always loathed and despised about the English school of portrait painters: their total lack of compunction about taking bribes! Velasquez didn't do it. Goya didn't do it. A few people like Gros did in France now and then, true; not many. El Greco didn't do it. Your Dutch painters just about never could be bribed. But the English—good God, *all* the time!"

"It *was* bribing, you're sure? It couldn't have been—well, that they really did see them that way?"

"Take the portraits of Mrs. Siddons, at the Huntington, for example. The lady had fine skin, of course she had fine skin, but not like *that*! And she couldn't have been—I mean she almost certainly could not have been—a *certified* goddess, holding her breath, no, in this case I'm going to say sucking in her guts, all the time. The grand scale, the fancier-than-human, the my-patrons-never-had-to-have-a-bowel-movement-in-their-entire-lives approach—nobody went in for that consistently except the English." Bitterly: "You don't seem to mind. I've noticed it never fazes you at all."

Virgil considered the accusation. At last he questioned, in a quiet voice demanding truth: "Do you never believe in anyone like that? Not even for a moment? That someone could exist, even *did* exist—*just* like that?"

McNaughton became acutely uncomfortable. Someone quite like Mrs. Siddons, someone indeed almost precisely like Mrs. Siddons, played a regally passionate part in his favorite night fantasy. He *accepted*, and he didn't accept, her exact, perfect existence. He replied scornfully, "You sound like Peter Pan begging us all to believe in fairies!"

Virgil laughed. And then surprised himself by making a confession: "I don't suppose I really believe they were like that, either. But it hurts me more not to be taken in by all that—oh, by the grand old days and grand old ways, if you like—than it probably did you when you found you couldn't go on believing in God."

Again McNaughton stood by the window; searched the sweet spring night. He asked, wonderingly: "Would you have—*been* somebody, Benthwick? In the 'grand old days,' over there—by birth?"

Virgil hesitated before answering, and it seemed to McNaughton he hesitated so as to be sure of the proper casualness. "Apparently. On the Sire's side, only. My mother—just pretty small beer there, I gather. For which, poor lady, she's paid. But on the Sire's side somebody or other seems to have been on speaking terms with royalty. Not to the Bloody-Mary-slept-here extent, but, anyway, speaking terms."

"Titled?"

"Titled. That's what I meant, actually. Not directly, but the Sire's father's oldest brother, and on back and back. That kind of thing."

"Why did he leave?"

"Oh, the country was going to pot, he said. He couldn't bear much of anything at all that happened after the war."

"Servants not kissing your foot?"

"Servants not kissing your foot, workingmen not knowing their place, too many people voting the wrong way. Inflation. Taxes were already pretty bad and then Lloyd George spent ten million pounds subsidizing the miners' wages—he had to, to break the strike, you know—and that was the last straw."

"What did the Sire want him to do?"

"Shoot them, I believe."

"Why the United States, for God's sakes? Why come here?"

"Well, he didn't actually, McNaughton. You know that. He just moved away from England, as a gesture, and transported what he wanted of it with him. I see the same thing happening now among the Jews from Germany. They're not really coming over here at all. They're just getting away from Hitler, but in their minds they're still in Germany."

"Let him eat them alive, then, the ones still there."

"How chauvinistic of you."

"Oh, but sometimes it seems they ask for so much of it, Benthwick!"

"Pogroms on request?"

McNaughton turned, to state his weary yes.

"*Et tu?* Scratch a gentile, find an anti-Semite? I'd thought better of you."

"Don't be absurd. Of course not. Nevertheless there are moments—that take me by surprise—when the very word connotes smiles for sale, and elbows in my ribs. 'My house is a decayed house, And the Jew squats on the window sill, the owner, Spawned in some estaminet of Antwerp. . . .'"

"But, supposing you'd been persecuted for centuries—for the great reason you wouldn't swallow the religion one of your own men evolved—"

"One of their own men! Sacrilege! To associate that wonderful mad poet with race! Why, it's almost as sacrilegious as associating him with religion!"

"Try to be sensible for a minute and listen to me. If for centuries every avenue of power but one was barred to you, you couldn't belong to the nobility, you couldn't own land, the professions wouldn't let you in—"

"But you know I've always been sorry for *all* men's pasts, Benthwick. Truly sorry."

"What I'm driving at is that for so deathly long, money was the only form of power possible to them."

McNaughton pondered, slumped in a chair. "Money. Money's of course the crux, isn't it? They've this habit of accumulating it so much more quickly than other people—so it's got to be taken away from them periodically; and in order to make the robbery legal, naturally they have to be murdered at the same time. I admit it's all appalling. What I can't understand is why I fail to become appalled, really deeply. For some reason, they keep being as alien to me as the chronically abandoned girl babies in China."

"Of course we both know you're lying: Freud alone would make up for all the elbow-poking and pawnbrokers in the world."

A deprecatory gesture: "Naturally, I wasn't talking about the intellectuals."

"That's possible? To talk about Jews and not talk about intellectuals?"

As if to have done with the subject: "Oh well, this is probably their last bad time anyway, Benthwick, since the whole question of money has got to be passé so soon: private money, ownership—all that kind of thing can never again be permitted very much importance; this depression proves it. And that should take them out of the hot box permanently."

"I agree it's obvious money as such will be a thing of the past almost immediately, but doesn't your very attitude indicate they'll probably never get out of the hot box? And what I can't understand is *why*? Are we jealous of them, or what?"

McNaughton made a soft contemptuous noise through his nostrils. "You've simply become enamored. A Jew on the street said to you one day, 'Be my friend,' and you became enamored. With the entire glittering House of David. How is he, by the way, your Abraham?"

Virgil stammered something McNaughton couldn't catch: something to the effect that Mr. Irving was as busy as usual, or that he hadn't been to the shop as much as usual lately. Shielded by his cigarette, McNaughton studied him keenly. It had puzzled him for some time, what was apt to happen to Virgil when this Abraham Irving was mentioned; occasionally his tongue seemed suddenly to balk, like a horse approaching quicksand. Something of mystery lay here, or at any rate a prickly sort of privacy; McNaughton had sensed it from the first time Virgil mentioned the man—and silently admitted now that he was more than a trifle piqued to be so excluded. "And I will make the cities of Judah a desolation without an inhabitant," he muttered.

They heard the Sire at the far end of the passageway.

He was calling softly, a shade petulantly, "Virgil? Virgil."

Virgil went to him quickly.

McNaughton heard: "Head seems thick tonight. In the mood for a little human companionship. Is my young friend McNaughton still here, by any chance?"

"Yes, sir. He is. Won't you come in and join us?" And diffidently: "We'd be delighted, if you'd care to."

"Yes, I think I should like that."

Virgil courteously held the door.

McNaughton stood. And was struck for the hundredth time by the Sire's majesty of bearing. Mr. Benthwick was such a small man and of such exquisite, economical proportions that he invariably made McNaughton feel too tall, attenuated to no purpose, or else almost the sturdy peasant. Was Napolcon of this sort, he wondered; was Louis XIV? And the little, pointed beard, the delicate skin, the piercing clear blue English eyes—precisely Virgil's eyes, if all warmth were removed. But what an aura was his! There was simply no ignoring it.

He was dressed in a brown velvet smoking jacket, his narrow feet encased in gold felt slippers. McNaughton wondered how Virgil went about presenting him with such things—for of course they came from the haberdashery—and decided the best way might be to lay them on his bedroom chair, unobtrusively, just after breakfast. It couldn't be a simple matter, surely. Probably comparable to the protocol for presenting offerings to an ancient Mayan priest. Yet, as always when he was in this presence, no real humor sparked his musings; like his self-confidence, his humor invariably dimmed.

Virgil asked his father if the slight head cold he'd had for a day or so was on the mend.

Yes, that was pretty largely gone. "But," and his tone somehow pathetically yet proudly suggested agedness, "it left my eyes a trifle on the weak side. Just one or two hours of reading seems to fatigue them." He coughed slightly.

Immediately, Virgil excused himself to fetch some cough medicine and a spoon. He offered them with a genuine air of solicitude.

McNaughton, watching, thought with surprised displeasure: *He loves him; he really loves him!* He couldn't remember loving his own father after the age of nine; realizing this fact now made him feel isolated, deprived. Besides, it was wrong, there was something actually quite wrong, morally, for Virgil to love the Sire, when certainly the Sire did not love him. He lowered his eyes.

They waited, respectfully, for the Sire to suggest a topic of conversation.

He examined the work Virgil had been doing; pronounced it satisfactory by his expression, by the lift of an eyebrow. "You're learning to be faithful to the—*climate* (as good a word as any) of a period, Virgil, as well as to the private spirit of a painter, and to the mood

of a work. I've noticed a steady growth of sensitivity there in your recent efforts. It quite pleases me. Actually, I'd say you're often astonishingly faithful to the mood of certain periods, considering your lack of background."

Virgil said, "Thank you, sir," and looked pleased; McNaughton threw him a look of contempt. But Virgil noticed nothing: he seemed unable anyway to communicate or to be communicated with whenever the Sire was near.

"I quite agree, sir. But before you came in, I was trying to talk him into making more of an effort toward original work. He's good enough by now at this sort of thing. It's excellent practice, certainly, and I understand the old masters went in for it about twenty times more than we do; but he needs to concentrate his energies in creative channels now. It's really time he started to."

The Sire murmured, "Oh?" noncommittally. And then, "Perhaps. Perhaps so."

McNaughton continued with enthusiasm: "Virgil, bring out that study of the Japanese family. You know the one. Bring it out, will you?"

"I painted over that."

"You did! Why?"

Virgil made a deprecatory gesture. "There was too much blue in it. Too much baby blue."

Destruction of the work made McNaughton angry, and he said so; adding, "I think you might have kept that one around a bit longer! I really do! It was certainly one of the best things—and one of the most *different* things—you've ever done!"

"You should be more considerate of your biographers and future executors, Virgil," his father said. "They may have to scrape away layers and layers of paint to unearth your—what was it, 'Japanese Family in Baby Blue?'"

If the sarcasm hurt enough to make him flush, Virgil nevertheless smiled obediently.

McNaughton did not. "What about the still life, then? The tangerines and the dice? What about that?"

"Oh—"

"Bring it out, Benthwick."

Heavily, Virgil brought it out. The most accurate thing to be said

about it—as well as the kindest and the least kind—was that it was after the manner of Cézanne.

"The reason I like that one so much," McNaughton said, "is that it tackles such a difficult color problem. You've made your blue dice appear to be a good six inches closer, more toward the front, than the tangerines—which must surely have been quite hard to do, wasn't it? I'm right, Benthwick? Your blue wants to recede all the time, doesn't it, and your orange to advance?"

Virgil nodded.

The Sire murmured, "Yes. Quite clever. And he kept it a tidy canvas."

"Let's see your seascape. The water color."

It was larger, more ambitious; and confessed, though not obsequiously, his admiration for Turner. A dulling change had come about since McNaughton had last seen it, however; the greens and blues had grayed. He wished he hadn't asked for it.

Virgil said, objectively, because he truly felt no strong emotion in this instance: "Water colors are simply not my dish of tea. I'll remember that from now on."

As they stared at it intently, McNaughton became aware, inexplicably, that a whip was being brought out, salted, and would be used against his friend. He kept trying so hard to think of protective words that two or three beads of perspiration broke out on his forehead. All eyes were fastened on the wretched seascape; and it would not vanish.

"I suppose enough bad art must have been perpetrated by the time of Christ to last the world forever," the Sire said.

Then: "Don't you?" the Sire insisted.

A longing to murder raced through McNaughton. Strangling, or bludgeoning; bludgeoning or strangling, it didn't matter which. Yet then, in this heat, he saw unforgettably the source of Virgil's "block." He would explain it to him, when next they were alone. If once you understood that sort of thing, it couldn't touch you any more. It was a piece of luck, after all, that he'd been shown the cause: now they'd fight it. He told himself he felt much better knowing the answer—even though it was such a hateful answer—than he'd felt when it had baffled him.

He told himself he felt much better. Yet when he looked at Virgil,

and saw him again in memory, hurrying for the cough medicine, he wasn't sure. He'd read that during medieval times court jesters were occasionally dwarfed and deformed in childhood, were kept in jars of stone, their bodies forced to grow this way or that for greater comic effect; he remembered now—and shivered.

"Not taking cold, are you?" the Sire questioned courteously. And, unanswered, continued: "You don't look well."

"I don't feel well," he said, expressionlessly but truthfully; and stood. His eyes met Virgil's, read supplication in them, an almost cringing apology. As he gathered Dr. Etienne's freshman papers from the desk and stuffed them carelessly into his worn notebook, all the ambitions they represented were suddenly revealed to him as pointless and flat, delusions only, or if real and strong, then cruel. The disappointment cutting him was so sharp his very body went cold and proud with the pain of it.

Groping away, as if escaping some suffocating wretchedness in the room, some slow dying, he mumbled to himself—and to whoever would listen—the command: "Stand erect, pick up thy past and grief and sins, and walk." And turned his sloping shoulders rudely on the Sire.

But Virgil followed him out, through the hall to the door, and tried there, for the first time in all the years of their friendship, to put the thing into words: "Don't you see, McNaughton? Christ, can't you see?" He leaned his head against the opened door, and begged, in desperate spite of his pride, miserably: "I'm absolutely the whole—the grand total *sum*—of everything he's got on earth! I'm—everything important. Because Mother is really merely—incidental, or—something on the order of an assistant, a kind of *accidental* associate, to him. Can't you grasp it, McNaughton? I'm his—whole blasted—*empire*!"

"*Mais non!* Say instead you're a cabbage boiled in brine," McNaughton advised, looking away. "Call yourself instead a cutlet for a cannibal." And going down the walk, he muttered dully, "I see the murdered to be suicides, murdered only on their own request."

Mr. Collin rarely muttered to himself, but whenever he did, two things were certain: his mood was vile, and he'd been drinking. Quite

often recently—actually, just in the months since his son Terrence had met Mr. Morley, and to a large extent even for the reason that his son had met Mr. Morley, though of course he had no way of guessing this—his mood was apt to turn vile; and today, a Saturday, it was especially wicked. Many things were wrong: his wife was at the funeral of one of their closest friends, and her absence depressed him. Not only should she be at home, in case he needed her for anything, but it bothered his conscience that he hadn't gone with her. Yet he could not have gone with her: never since his childhood had he gone to a funeral. He would not admit death, just as he'd not admit sickness or weakness, just as he hated delicacy. He himself would die quite suddenly, while he was still strong: he often said so. "By God!" the mutter now, as he sat staring rather viciously out the dirty kitchen window. "By God, when I go, I'll go—" the fingers snapped, "like that!" He imagined himself somehow disappearing instantly.

Many things were wrong: he'd been without so much as a single day's work for three full weeks, and no employment was in sight; and while the ordinary bricklayer might not have been too concerned over such a brief layoff, Mr. Collin was decidedly concerned: he wasn't the ordinary bricklayer, he was a master bricklayer, one to be requested by name by foremen and contractors, almost always employed, depression or no. He'd been going daily to the Union Labor Temple to see if anything had come up; and it was bitter for him to watch younger men, less capable, given preference over himself. It was explained to him: these men had five or six little children to support. He wasn't mollified; there was after all such a thing as birth control! He couldn't see why people too careless to use contraceptives should be given work when careful ones like himself were not. He said so; and lost in popularity, and gained nothing.

Besides, his son Bud, the plasterer's apprentice, was away, working on a job in Sacramento; Mr. Collin missed him sorely. They exchanged post cards, but there wasn't much satisfaction in that. He wanted the boy near. And then that Terrence! He didn't know just what the matter was, but lately he simply couldn't bear the sight of that pretty fool! Beginning to give himself airs now, on top of everything else! He'd tripped him on the cellar stairs for a joke the other day—you'd think a boy eighteen years old could see you put your foot out—and the crazy goof had fallen down and sprained his wrist!

And cut himself under the nose; bled as if he'd drown! It was funny, of course, to watch, but still—well, he hadn't meant to cause all that. So later he'd gone, against his better judgment, to the fool and had said, very civil, too, "I didn't mean to do all that to you, Terry boy. You better look where you're going, more." An apology! Imagine *apologizing* to that— And the stuck-up little—well, there was a word for boys like Terrence, but he wouldn't use it, because if he thought he really was one— Anyway, the kid had just stared right back, haughty as a cat, and hadn't said a word. The hand that had snapped its fingers turned into a fist. He'd restrained himself that time, but one more thing, one more look, one more word from that little— Why, he'd half-kill him! That's what he needed. Do him a world of good.

He prowled around the house, restless, finally mean. He drank a little more gin: it tasted foul, but burned properly going down. He liked to have fun when he drank. He liked to sing, to pinch his wife, to make her laugh, or at least to be where there was music or dancing. This was a rotten way, drinking all by yourself, sipping it a bit at a time to make it last—exactly like some God damned schoolteacher! He cursed his wife briefly for having gone to the funeral—

It was a decent day for weather: he could have gone out. But though he wasn't broke—as a matter of fact, he usually kept pretty close to five hundred dollars in the bank—he never liked to spend a cent more than he had to when he wasn't working; so if he'd gone out, it would have been just for a walk, and that was certainly a fool thing to do. He prowled around. That Terrence! Why in hell couldn't he be here, at home, today? He could send him to the store, or try to teach him to box or something. He snorted at the idea of teaching Terrence to box. But then agreed with himself seriously: *somebody* should sure as hell teach him *something*! He ambled into his sons' room. What did Terrence expect would happen to him, when finally that rich old Mrs. Galmayer had her fill of him? And was Bud forever to pay his board and room? He shook his head, decided: "Probably end up as a ribbon clerk in a dime store." At first the idea amused him, but then hatred began stirring in him; hatred of the white-collar class. More than any other people in the world, more than big businessmen or little businessmen, more than servants or parasites, even more than politicians or policemen, white-collar workers fed his

hatred. He sat on one of the beds and hated blackly: all the snubs he'd received from clerks revived themselves in his mind. Clean soft hands that hadn't liked to put change into his calloused hand. . . . One time a clerk had very plainly preferred to stand rather than to sit next him on the bus when he'd been coming home from work. After standing all day, probably; but couldn't bear the stink of *him*! And they didn't even make as much money as he did, a thing somehow especially galling. So Terrence would be one of them some day. Of course he would; he saw that now. He swore quietly, obscenely.

Well, it didn't matter. But—he clenched his fist—it did! That shouldn't be allowed to happen. Terrence ought to go—he'd told him a hundred times he ought to go—into the C.C.C. Make a man of him! Sure it would! Why, it was a fine opportunity for a young kid! But, oh no, Terrence thought he was too good for anything like that.

Nevertheless, there wasn't much to be done about it really, not with Bud paying the kid's board and all. He went back to the kitchen for more gin.

With almost miraculous speed, between one drop and the next, his fantasies became more pleasant. Terrence was a genius painter: crowds came to the house, swarmed around; pansies in New York wrote about him in the papers; people wanted everything he'd ever done; money, money, money everywhere you looked. And they said to him, "Are you his father?" And he nodded, choked with emotion. Choked with emotion? Why that? Oh, yes, he saw the reason now: Terrence had just died. Well, no matter. And they said, "Did you know—did you know he was a great painter?" And he just nodded, choked with emotion.

Then abruptly he realized what he'd been doing, and felt like a fool. God damn that woman! Why couldn't she be here and keep him company? It was enough to drive a man nuts, being left in solitary like this. He began another savage tour of the house.

Again, he wandered into the boys' bedroom. A motive of simple curiosity took him: he wondered what Terrence's so-called "work" was beginning to look like now, after all these years of doodling.

He discovered a portfolio in which he found a buxom nude, a pencil sketch; well, he'd done buxom nudes himself when he was that age. Nothing in that to go to college for; he chuckled; maybe

the kid would turn out all right after all. He found a water color of the sky and ocean. Pretty enough, he granted it was pretty enough; some people liked things like that. He didn't happen to be too crazy about that sort of thing himself. Then a Ferris wheel, bold and happy with yellow; he liked that better, was beginning to feel encouraged.

He pulled out a few more things, with boredom creeping on. Tried to be fair; admitted that at least the kid seemed to do a lot of work anyway, tackled a good many different things.

Then he found a large charcoal drawing; and his brains began to boil, to sizzle, to fry with rage.

His anger became so intense and acute it cleansed him almost entirely of drunkenness. All the insults he'd suffered throughout his life, all the insults combined, were not the equal of what he saw.

The drawing showed him and his wife and Bud, and the girl who was engaged to be married to Bud, all sitting as they often sat, around the dining room table, playing cards. Mrs. Collin was shown only from the back, her stringy greasy hair cruelly recognizable. He himself, full-face; the other two, contrasting profiles. And he—the father, the head of the house—was drawn as not so much a man as an ape.

His hands and arms, his jaw, his eyes, the thick twice-broken nose and the great bull neck—they all shouted: "Look at the animal dressed as a man!" The mouth was made of hard rubber, stretched into a grin of senseless evil. The gaps between his teeth were shown clearly; a shred of tobacco clung to his unshaved chin. Slight tufts of hair grew from his ears and nostrils. Dirt never to be washed out lay deep in all the wrinkles of his head and hands and neck. His neck was as thick as a thigh and as coarse as beef.

He ran to the mirror, gasping. He rushed back to the drawing, and whimpered with fury.

Bud's face was stupid, patient, honest, crude; but at least human. Nevertheless, even by itself it would have been enough to enrage him: he couldn't have put the matter into words, but he felt condescension in the treatment here also, scornfully pitying aloofness. And it was *this* son who paid for the bastard's (suddenly he knew Terrence was literally a bastard) food, and who was kind enough to share his room with him!

The desire to punish Terrence become so great it made him ache, as if with fiercest lust.

The girl was shown to be, or so he read her, nothing but an ordinary whore. Yet for a long time he'd been fond of her, and he knew positively, with some secret intelligence of his body, that she was a virgin; she was a lively girl, had a good healthy figure, but he'd have sworn to her innocence. And that little (and now suddenly he knew this about him too) *fairy*, *fairy*, that *fairy* had dared to draw her as a plain two-dollar whore! He was trembling, and a dry sob of frustration tore from his throat. Why, if it hadn't been for that sissy pansy of a bastard, those two kids probably could've saved enough to be married by now! Married, except for him! And *that* was something *he'd* never know about, he'd *never* know anything about *that*!

He could not take his eyes from the drawing.

The mutter: "I'll kill him—" And then his big fist coming to his mouth, his lips opening, teeth biting the skin on the back of his hand: for he realized—and realized it as a gross unfairness—that he must not kill Terrence, that he could be killed himself if he did.

But he would not have him in the house any more. He'd not have that.

He found a cheap suitcase in his own closet; threw Terrence's few clothes into it. He took all the art work he could find—all excepting the one large charcoal drawing—and tore it into bits and tossed the bits into the suitcase. He broke what brushes he could find, but there were only two or three. Apparently Terrence kept most of his things some other place.

The charcoal drawing he placed on top of the dresser, using a hairbrush and a comb to prop it up. It would explain, better than he could, to his other son and to his wife, why he had done what he was doing.

He became very calm, went to the kitchen for a gulp of gin, and planned his course of action. He'd go to work on the little bastard as soon as he could, and come as close as was safe to beating the life out of him—he didn't think they'd arrest him for that, and if they did, he wouldn't care—and then he'd knock him out the door and throw the suitcase after. But he mustn't let him lose consciousness, or even the capacity to walk—because he wanted him to be, immediately then, *gone*!

And afterwards, he'd never, for as long as he lived, think of him again.

"Don't think about it, Collin; don't think about him ever again," Robb murmured, his hands gentle as they cleaned and infinitely soothing as they dressed the cuts and bruises of Terrence's face, chest, shoulders, neck, arms, and back.

"I thought he was going to kill me, honest to God! Please, Nixon, please believe me! I thought honest to God he was going to kill me!"

"Keep your voice down. And just try to steady yourself now, Collin. You could get a fever from all this. Or something. I don't know. This is probably like shock, and you should really be taking everything easy and not getting excited, don't you see?"

Another long grave shudder shook Terrence's body; lasted, furiously, ten or twelve seconds. He was shivering and perspiring, almost simultaneously.

Robb had never before seen anyone in such a state—somehow not in so much as past hysteria, and so abused. Yet, though he was seriously worried for Terrence, he dared neither to telephone the family doctor nor to go to his parents' room for help. There'd be merry hell to pay if his mother, or even his father, found out the poor guy had been beaten like this by his own dad; and then had come to their house at midnight. He could hear them, telling it over a bridge table, "So we finally had to explain we just *aren't* competing with the Salvation Army rescue missions! Yes, Robb's friends, you know: he has a real knack of selection. When he was little, he was always bringing home every stray cat and dog he could find—now it's people!" He winced. Somehow, hostile as they were to Terrence already, they must be kept from putting the really final taboo on him.

But when Terrence came out of the shudder, he again set to begging Robb to see how it had been and to believe him, that he had really thought—no, had *known*—he was going to be killed.

"Certainly, I believe you. For God's sake now, Collin, of *course* I believe you. But please be quiet, will you? Please, now. Betty's out tonight, but *they're* home. They'll hear! You don't want them to come barging in here, do you?"

As soon as he'd finished with the ointments, he padded away

silently to find, in the bathroom, his mother's little box of sleeping pills. Returned, he administered one with water, propping up Terrence's head for the sip; but then realized the tension he combated was too strong: gave the second. He turned out all the lights except the night light, and sat by the side of the bed, murmuring tonelessly, as though talking to a child, "Now, you sleep, Collin. You go to sleep, and rest, and in the morning you'll feel much better. You'll be fine. Really you will, Collin."

But Terrence could not go to sleep, even so, without cruel dreams: his body tried, periodically, to hunch together as if to steel itself against a blow. He moaned, "No!" And once he cried, "Didn't *do* it! I didn't, no, I didn't *mean*—"

"You didn't do anything, Collin, or whatever you did was all right. Now listen to me. think about something else!"

It occurred to Robb he'd never really known what pity was at all till now. Not only did his mind feel wretched, but his body seemed to ache for every bruise he'd tended. Terrence had been cut on the back of the neck somehow, probably with a belt buckle, and his own neck hurt painfully. His own right shoulder was almost stiff with soreness: Terrence had apparently been kicked there with a heavy boot. He felt the frustration of helplessness.

Nevertheless, he found himself wondering why Terrence hadn't chosen the Morley house, rather than here. It wasn't much farther away, and surely he'd been going there often enough lately to understand how much better a refuge it would make: George had a hundred times greater resources, what with servants and a car and much more room, and could easily have paid a doctor bill from his own pocket. Mr. Morley being the way he was, there'd be no snooping parents around. He sat wondering about this, when Terrence began calling him again, and, at the same moment, jerked an arm up as if trying to protect himself.

To hear his own name cried out in this way touched Robb almost unbearably. He lowered Terrence's arm gently, fixed it in a comfortable position, and held the clammy hand between his own; and again murmured reassurances. Suddenly, angrily, he wanted to be so strong that nothing like this could ever happen to anyone again; wanted such strength with a power and fierceness he hadn't known he possessed—but then thought himself into patience.

Yet the idea continued to grow: if it became necessary, he'd pro-

tect Terrence with his life. And this much he did not reject as melodramatic.

He began to feel ashamed of himself for not having helped him, encouraged him, even more than he had in the past. There was something about Terrence—his looks, probably—that made too many people want to tear him down. He'd watch for that, from now on; they just wouldn't while he was around, any more.

And once, he smiled: he'd thought *he* had family troubles!

Finally Terrence's breathing grew more peaceful. Still Robb sat watching by the bed for half an hour; for an hour more.

In the morning he explained to his parents, very coolly, very matter-of-factly, over bacon and eggs, that out-of-town relatives had come to visit the Collins last night unexpectedly, and that Terrence had given up his bed for them. In a few days they'd be gone, and Terrence would go back home. But in the meantime, he was going to stay here. And stay in bed, as a matter of fact, because he happened to have a bad cold. He'd be no trouble: Robb would bring him his food and wash his dishes.

And he told the lie so blandly, as though it were so patently a matter of information rather than of permission, that his parents were reduced to a single word: "Well!" They'd been sensing a difference in him lately; it was, noticeable ever since he'd taken that engraving job at McCormick's Jewelry Store on Saturdays; he was more assertive, more confident, every day. But this morning's change was more than they were prepared for. "Well!"

He answered, "Yes," and looked at them levelly and looked calmly away. He saw his mother searching for the properly devastating words. His own mind began to whirl about feverishly, groping for an adequate defense.

When he found it he almost laughed: it was so stalwart and so simple. If he told them who George was (he never had, so they certainly didn't know—in fact, they probably didn't even know his last name), if he told them that he was the son, and the only child at that, of *the* George Morley, how their eyes would pop, and how their voices would soften, and then, so as not to be hatefully obvious, how tolerant their hearts would have to grow toward Terrence! It was so sound a balance, he couldn't fathom why he'd never thought of it before.

"Honestly, Robb, your friends—"

"Yes, Mother, my friends?"

And one of the delights of the subsequent conversation ("Well, not quite *all* my friends . . .") was that he didn't have to exaggerate by so much as a word, nor add a foot to the size of the swimming pool, nor overestimate the servants' quarters by so much as a single bathroom.

He was remarkably good-natured about it; when he finished, Mr. and Mrs. Nixon merely sat staring at him, without so much as a "Well!" All his mother managed to say, though even that not right away, was: "I always thought he had a serious air, that George. He never seemed at all frivolous." And Mr. Nixon agreed: "The Morleys have had money for generations. Families of that sort train their children for their responsibilities."

When breakfast was over, both parents reminded Robb that a liquid diet was best for colds. He permitted himself nothing, not even a smile.

Later in the day, however, he saw his mother deep in quiet conversation with his sister, who'd slept past breakfast. They were in the living room; he saw them from the kitchen. Something premonitory stirred in his heart. He would go, must go, to Betty; he must explain a little to her about George. Not warn her, exactly. But she really should be told that George wasn't a moonlight-and-roses boy, and that he expected rather a lot from his dates. Yet possibly she'd already learned as much; but she'd never said a word. Something in his conscience nagged that he should at least tell her how George felt about marrying, that he thought it unnecessary, stupid. With George, it quite truly wasn't just talk. He felt sorry, for a moment, that he'd used George. Yet in memory he heard the beaten voice again, calling his name, and saw the bruised arm coming up over the face; he told Betty, in his mind, she must look after herself. Whatever help he had to give was going elsewhere.

Yet the next day, Monday, when he came home from the university, and prepared his patient a bowl of soup and brought it to him, Terrence stared at him oddly, with a face remote and worried, and mumbled in a way foreign to his usual manner, "You may be sorry for helping me, later."

"Oh? See if that needs salt. I forgot the salt."

"If you knew—*everything* about me, you might not help me."

"That a fact? Eat your soup while it's hot."

Terrence said no more, and began, slowly, eating the soup.

"You're bound to feel lousy mentally, for a day or so more, Collin. And just staying in bed is depressing all by itself. At least it is to me."

"I don't mean anything like that."

Robb found a piece of candy, unwrapped it, ate it. He wondered what the beating had been for, yet wondered without intense curiosity: he'd heard a little about Mr. Collin.

But when he glanced at Terrence again, he saw to his horror that he was crying. Silently, without shame.

"He hated me. He always hated me. He was always yelling at me."

Robb felt so acutely embarrassed that the only thing he could do was to try to make a joke of it. "Stop crying in your soup. You're just supposed to cry in your beer."

Terrence sniffled and glanced up in surprise. "In your beer? I thought it was in your beard." He seemed genuinely puzzled.

Robb laughed, made Terrence laugh with him. "No, I think it's beer. It's a form of *vin triste*, only with beer."

Terrence finished his soup, then sighed deeply. "Nixon, I want you to know—whatever happens—see, whatever happens—" Again, tears.

"Stop that, Collin," Robb ordered gravely. "Stop that, or I'll have to get a doctor."

Terrence stopped, yet visibly it required all the control he had.

"O.K., now?"

"I'm O.K.," in a dead voice.

"By the way, does your mother know where you are? Will she be worried?"

Terrence looked straight into space, as if terrified. "Please don't tell anybody where I am."

"Don't be silly. This kind of thing doesn't happen twice. There *are* jails, you know."

A twisted smile: "Yes, I know."

"Will she be worried?"

A pause, and then the same dead voice: "Why don't you call her and see?"

"You said a minute ago not to tell anyone."

"It doesn't matter. They'll find me sooner or later."

"What did you do, Collin? Tell me what you did." For the first time, he began to be afraid.

"What I did," Terrence sat erect, carefully placed his tray on the night table, and spoke deliberately, slowly, spoke hopelessly yet somehow even without pity for his own hopelessness, "what I did was to put my foot out, and trip him, on the cellar stairs. I thought he was going to kill me—"

Because he didn't want to hear: "No. I mean before he—started."

"You mean why he—*why* he—" Wonderingly: "I don't know. I never did know why he got so mad. He didn't tell me." He seemed extraordinarily calm now, almost indifferent. "I thought he was going to kill me, and I tripped him so's he'd stop."

A pause. "Well, of course. To give yourself time to run away."

Again a pause. "I couldn't've run anywhere." Tonelessly: "He—didn't get up." During the entire exchange he hadn't once focused his eyes on Robb's face. "And there was—some blood—by his eyes. But, I don't know—Because, maybe it wasn't even—his."

But again his mood changed, completely. He looked at Robb trustingly, yet with a touch of diffidence. "Nixon, could I have some more paper? I used up all you gave me this morning."

Robb could not have spoken for a price. He found the pad of paper, brought some sharpened sketching pencils, adjusted the shade for more light. And, as he did these things, he gradually realized—though for a moment he fought the idea passionately—that he should go to the Collin home, not just telephone.

The afternoon had turned damp and cool: he put on a coat and a cap. Turning then from the mirror, he saw Terrence sketching and completely absorbed in his sketch; and saw something close to the look of contentment on his face. The childishness of two sentences: "I never did know why he got so mad. He didn't tell me," kept echoing in his mind. And the "Nixon, could I have some more paper?" recalled itself too—astonishing, unbelievable, yet somehow right, acceptable.

He said gently, without letting it sound too important, "And when you've used that, I'll get you some more." Silently he added, the reason unknown even to himself: *And some more, and some more. And whatever else you need.*

Leaving the room, he paused to touch Terrence's forehead, as if to check for fever, and told him, "I have to go out for a little while now. You take it easy."

Terrence said, "Sure. O.K.," calmly enough and without looking up. His sketch, Robb saw, was of an alley—the trash cans, the telephone poles, the back gates there, the unpainted fences; the alley of a poor district, at the time of sunset, the viewing point a dog's eye level. It promised to be an excellent sketch.

It happened that he recognized this alley when he came to it, nearly an hour later.

The details were so fresh, so similar that he realized Terrence must have memorized the view while resting there after the beating.

And when he thought of Terrence as he was now, propped up against pillows, repeating the scene objectively, drawing it with his own careful dispassionate accuracy, dirty garbage pail by crooked trash can lid, Robb felt that he was not strong enough to endure the creeping coldness that possessed him.

Because he had approached the Collins' house by the streets—it was on his return that he wandered through alleys, after seeing what he'd half-known he'd see: the black crepe on the door, and the drawn shades.

It was on one of the broadest streets in Oakland, on a darkened wintry afternoon toward the last of 1933, that Virgil Benthwick had first seen the niece of Abraham Irving; at the moment he did, he strongly regretted his bad fortune.

Before she accosted him, he was in the sort of mood that came on him sometimes with the sweetest pleasure and comfort. Everything was a bit of a mess, the world by and large a great bore, but wise men retired from the hot foolishness of life into their own realms of tolerant amusement. The only key needed for entrance into such realms was a certain quality of dispassion, a quality he had pretty well in grasp. Sitting alone on the bench where he regularly waited for the bus that took him to the haberdashery, he drew out his pipe

thoughtfully, stuffed it, lighted it in a way contemptuous of time, and told himself it wouldn't be easy for anyone to be more dispassionate than he. If McNaughton were urbane, there were moments he himself was imperturbably urbane.

But when the wretched little girl appeared, she destroyed his mood entirely.

For one thing, she took him by surprise. She seemed to come from nowhere. At a given moment, he was alone. At the next, she was standing before him, obviously distressed, quite rumped, and appealing to him with tear-lustered eyes. A shameless little girl, he felt, for she wasn't satisfied to address his humanity quietly or subtly, with time for him to respond, but instead she simply tore right into him to get at his sympathy. She was dressed primly, severely, in a private school uniform. But underneath it she was sweaty and animal. "Please, sir," she almost gasped at him, "if you don't mind: I've got to go to the bathroom."

"You— I say, you've—" But he saw she couldn't stand on the same foot for more than two seconds at a time. Rising suddenly, he shouted to her to follow him and rushed into the nearest store.

It happened to be a yardage shop, and the clerk whom Virgil found must have been from his birth a preposterous tight-lipped old woman of a middle-aged man. "Nothing of that kind here," he shook his head proudly. "The law requires those sort of conveniences be licensed, for one thing, and they got to have a certain number of square moppable feet of floor space, and I don't know what all. Nothing for the public here. But I'll tell you what: you might try Kress, middle of the block."

"But you people yourself, I mean surely there's somewhere the employees—"

"That's got nothing to do with the public. We're absolutely forbidden to think of letting the public—"

"Good Lord, man, can't you tell an emergency when you're looking at one? It's after all a *child*—"

The clerk merely smirked his defiance of emergencies. "It's the law, and the law's the law."

Having no idea he was about to do it, Virgil suddenly seized the little girl by the hand and whipled her into the back of the shop. Her

hand was even more desperate than he'd supposed, but they found the proper door in time. During her visit, he stood guard, feeling as competent and foolish as Sir Walter Raleigh.

She thanked him reverently when she came out, and he thanked the clerk coldly; the clerk ignored them both with the dignity of frustration.

Reaching the street just in time to see the bus he'd been waiting for pull off, Virgil raced frantically all the way to the next corner. There, the signal he'd been counting on to halt traffic turned a malicious green; his bus sailed on. He realized he'd be late for work, and admitted the seriousness of his situation.

Yet nothing could be done: he returned to urbanity.

Settling on the nearest bench, he again drew out his pipe. He hadn't yet comforted himself with it when the child found him and climbed up beside him. He turned his back firmly. He'd done his part: it was time the blasted gum-chewing public took her to its heart.

"I'm Vanya Rubin."

"I'm Til Eulenspiegel."

"How do you do? How are you?"

He turned to look at her almost angrily—and saw she had become someone different, she was indescribably aware now that she was superior to most adults, certainly to all children. "I'm fine," he glowered down on her as nastily as possible. "I've recovered from a pressure I used to suffer on the bladder."

"I'm so glad."

"What are you doing here, anyway? Shouldn't you be in school?"

"This is Saturday."

"I know this is Saturday. But that's a school uniform, and you're a boarder. I doubt you're supposed to be on the streets, alone."

"Were you ever a boarder?"

"For years and years, I was a boarder. What's that got to do with it?"

"Nothing exactly, except I find it very tiresome. Didn't you?"

"You shouldn't be talking to strangers. Don't you know that? Especially to strange men."

"You're not a strange man: you helped me, you're a friend."

When he again turned his back, she added, "Please be friendly the way you were."

"I was *not* friendly!"

"Oh." And it was apparent her conviction of superiority could be dimmed. "I guess you don't like children."

Rather undone by the sudden smallness of her voice, he asked more gently, "Have you— That is to say, are you playing truant?"

"I'm having an adventure."

"You're— You'd better go back. Really. Dreadful things could happen to you."

"I don't think so. For example, I wouldn't talk to just anyone. Just harmless people like you— It was a terrible school; rules, rules, nothing but rules."

With annoyance quiet but real: "If you imagine I'll waste another second of my time, turning you over to the police or anything of that sort—"

She smiled shingly. "I *knew* you were nice, the first second! All day people've been threatening they would, till I talk 'em out of it."

"All day! How long've you been gone?"

"I left right after bed-check. I'd saved quite a bit of money for it. Here," she drew a little paper bag from her pocket, "would you like some candy or some gum?"

"Thank you, no. You mean to say you've actually been out the night?"

She smiled again, as if pleased with his brightness.

"Little girl, I say— This is pretty serious. Does your mother—"

"When my mother comes to this country—she's in Germany right now lecturing to people and inciting them—I'm going to explain it to her, about this school, and she'll just be glad I got out. When *she's* home, I'm always in progressive schools."

"But surely *someone's* worried?"

"Only since this morning. Prob'ly the school found out this morning and told my uncle. But his twenty-four hours aren't even half over. He's supposed to be worried for twenty-four hours."

"Little girl—"

"Please don't keep calling me little girl. It's so babyish. My name's Vanya Rubin. To tell you the truth, I'm pretty sick of candy myself

by now." She put the things she'd offered him back in her pocket.

He asked in rather a strained voice, "Just out of curiosity: why does your uncle have to be worried for twenty-four hours?"

"Because that's the way you appreciate things, to go without them for twenty-four hours. The last time I kept telling him how this school isn't progressive, he made me go twenty-four hours without talking, to appreciate the gift of speech."

Virgil murmured, "A Solomon of uncles! How old are you, Vanya?"

"Almost nine. But I'm extremely precocious."

"You're quite certain?"

Nodding: "My report card says it's what makes me so unpopular. In progressive schools it's all right to be precocious, though; nobody cares. And you don't always have to go walking in rows, like we do at this dumb place. Every day we go walking in rows, all around the neighborhood. That's how I found the haunted house where I stayed."

"You don't seriously imagine I believe that?"

She looked at him with surprise; then smiled generously. "Oh, don't be silly! There's really no such thing as haunted houses, don't you know that? Never be scared of 'em, because all it is, is poor unfortunates living in 'em who can't pay the rent, and then ign'rant people get scared and stay away, scared of the ghosts, if they see a candlelight or hear a voice or anything. My uncle explained it all to me. There're no such thing as ghosts. And the reason the poor unfortunates can't pay the rent is, the repression brings it on. Nobody ever told you?"

"I—" The symbolic value of his pipe seemed to be lessening, moment by moment. He took it from his mouth and held it, dissatisfied.

"Anyway, one day we were out on a walk, in rows, and we saw some boys throwing rocks at the windows and saying it was haunted. So I decided, right then, 'When I run away, I'll go there!'"

"Vanya—" But his voice failed him: was she not after all more competent with the streets than he?

"And, just like I said, there were these poor unfortunates in it, an old woman and an old man that couldn't breathe good, and another woman with a lot of make-up. And they said, if I didn't go back to school in the morning, they'd tell the police. But I said naturally they

wouldn't, because they didn't pay the rent. *Then* they didn't say anything. They were all *very* poor unfortunates and they jumbled their words."

Putting his pipe away altogether: "So, would you mind telling me what you've planned for the evening?"

"I think I'll see if I can find an all-night movie that has in it about the *anche't* Romans and gladiators. And if anyone sees I'm staying too long and tries to take me to the police, I'll run away and ride busses and the ferry till my money's gone, all but a nickel, and then I'll call my uncle."

He closed his eyes, wondering what luck he'd have with the experiment of pretending she'd never happened. But, blind, he recalled how she'd been the first moment, so rumpled and distressed. Triumphantly, he attacked with, "I say, since you're so extremely precocious, to say the least, why'd you wait so long to go to the bathroom?"

"Oh, that." She flushed slightly. "Because it's a dirty habit. Especially for young ladies. And anyway, it leads to other things. So this morning I decided I wouldn't go any more. Then I decided I'd go just for today and break myself of the habit gradually. When I had to ask you like that, I'd already been to three places, and they all said no, they didn't have any. That could have happened to anybody, even a grown person."

When he saw his bus approaching from several blocks away, he spoke to her sternly: "Listen to me now, Vanya. You *must* go immediately to that store right there," he pointed, "and telephone your uncle. *Immediately!* Promise me! I've got to go now, and I can't leave you unless you promise. Vanya—promise me now!"

She smiled at him delightedly. She shook her head.

He groaned, realizing he'd given himself away and that of course she'd have no mercy. He swore under his breath. Should he seize her and take her on the bus with him, turning her over to the police when they were at the haberdashery? But she might kick and fuss enough so that people would think he was kidnaping her. And, besides, who knew what story she'd make up next? "Damnation!"

He let the bus go, promising himself that her uncle would have to clear him at the haberdashery. Then he set to wheedling her like a sycophant, persuading her to talk of this and that, at last tricking her into naming her uncle, finally flattering her into being gracious

enough to let the man off with fewer hours than twenty-four. After perhaps ten minutes, he gained his point: walking hand in hand—for he trusted her not at all—they went together to the nearest telephone.

Abraham Irving sounded as though he might have been banging his head against the wall. It took him several minutes to understand that Vanya hadn't been kidnapped.

But when he arrived at the bus bench, he surprised Virgil: his fury with the child seemed at once immeasurably, coldly unforgiving, and tenderly, passionately possessing. He rushed directly to where she sat triumphant on the bench, and, with both hands, began stroking her head and ears; all the while he babbled something softly—Virgil supposed Yiddish love words. Then his tone changed fiercely and he clapped her not altogether lightly on the cheek. After berating her for half a minute, he pointed in the direction of his parked car—it was around the corner—and ordered her to it.

Vanya, apparently too shocked by such treatment to cry, obeyed him mechanically, her face stretched oddly from its usual confident shape. Once she turned back to glance at Virgil, but sight of the two men staring after her was evidently too embarrassing. She began walking more quickly.

"And now, you, sir!" Abraham Irving turned to Virgil, surprising him again, because his manner had instantly become controlled, the manner of someone years removed from emotional outbursts. He studied Virgil deliberately, boldly, taking him in, detail by detail; Virgil felt it wouldn't be forgotten that his eyes were blue and his suit of good quality. With the gravest of bows: "Please believe me, Mr. Benthwick, I am very truly your servant. I beg you to instruct me how to express my gratitude."

Virgil noticed the slightest trace of accent, a stiffness with English that indicated it had been learned in adulthood; and for some reason, some echo of old restraint or extra care, he guessed it had been learned without joy. He answered promptly: he'd appreciate Mr. Irving's clearing him at the haberdashery by explaining why he came so late, and, if it weren't too much trouble, he'd like a ride to the haberdashery right now.

Mr. Irving seemed to think his request absurd, very funny indeed.

He clasped his hands together, and let them massage each other, as if to communicate his amusement to them. "Please allow me."

Virgil having named the haberdashery, Mr. Irving drove to it directly. No one said a word, though Vanya sniffed occasionally.

During the ride, everything began seeming strange to Virgil; not impossible, but strange: Abraham Irving was only in his early forties, and a healthy-looking, virile man of leonine proportions—at the same time, he was indescribably, darkly ancient; he dressed well, with almost self-conscious inconspicuousness, yet his driving was quite different. He drove arrogantly, cutting in ahead wherever he wished; if he seemed restrained, precise, as though he'd been taught timidity, he was nevertheless clearly contemptuous of other drivers' daring.

When the car was parked, Virgil began to get out. But Mr. Irving motioned him to stay inside. "Guard her," he said. "She runs away, I just learned it this morning." He motioned toward the haberdashery, "I know these people, the manager Mr. Jacob, and so on. I can explain better what you did, without you there."

After a few minutes he returned, Mr. Jacob fawning beside him.

Virgil was embarrassed to blushing: he'd become a hero.

Quickly, Mr. Irving dismissed the manager and started his car. He told Virgil, "We will go now to my place of business. The rest of the day is yours—Mr. Jacob insisted—and I want just enough of it to let you choose a gift from my shop. Then, if I may, I shall drive you to wherever you wish to go."

"Mr. Jacob insisted I take the day off? You've apparently a very—lubricating effect on him," Virgil murmured a trifle insolently, to regain aplomb.

"Yes, so I have surely. He collects for Jewish welfare organizations. I am not a wealthy man, and I am not a generous man, but I contribute generously to Jewish welfare organizations."

"Oh?" And even more vaguely: "Is that so?"

"Yes. Because they impressed me very favorably once by saving my life." His smile was hard and all on the surface, like the eyes of a bird. Yet it seemed far from insincere, or too complex to be merely insincere. Virgil wanted to understand it, and felt at the same time he could never understand it. "How did that happen," he mumbled rather stupidly, "that they saved your life?"

"It happened," Abraham's voice was as remote from passion as

a barber's, "in 1919 when the Communists ordered Odessa cleared of Jews and gave us just four days' warning to get out or be killed. A whole community of us made the journey together, from the Ukraine to the Orient, mostly on cattle cars. Some of us, naturally, died along the way. But without the Jewish welfare organizations, we should all have died."

Virgil nodded an impassive head. Whatever else Englishmen could be accused of, he reflected, at least there was never any of this excruciating torture with them. They never said, "How do you do? I've several ulcers and suffer such agonies with nerves I'm considering suicide. My wife is scheduled for double mammectomy tomorrow." They did not do that. He had not found them dull, but if they were dull, they at least did not do that.

"I beg your pardon," Mr. Irving said. "I have embarrassed you, I see. Let us discuss another topic. My shop is an art shop. Have you any interest in objects of art?"

The quickness of his own desire and curiosity, coming so soon after personal aversion, irritated Virgil. He mumbled that while he'd certainly be interested in seeing Mr. Irving's shop, a gift would be quite overdoing matters. "The Communists supposed Jewish people would remain loyal to the Czar?" he asked in a clearer tone, telling himself that now he'd got urbanity by its hair.

For some reason, Mr. Irving chuckled. But stopped before he answered, and answered without amusement. "Not necessarily. Because the Czars had not been pleased to be too gracious to us either. Pogroms—perhaps one to a generation. But I will not bore you. No, it was *not* assumed we would necessarily be loyal to the Czarist régime. It was merely considered a—generally beneficial move." With slight irritation, watching Virgil's face: "It perplexes me, why this kind of subject should be so taboo. Chancellor Hitler is easily capable of working up similar arrangements in Germany tomorrow."

They both remembered Vanya at the same moment. "Are you hungry, Baby?" Mr. Irving asked her.

"What do you care?"

Mr. Irving gestured rather hopelessly. It was almost the first time he'd made a gesture, and Virgil guessed he'd carefully trained himself away from gesturing. "So, what do I care? Very well, I shall not care."

"She tells me she's had enough candy, anyway."

"Tattletale! Tat—"

"Vanya! Silence! Mr. Benthwick, excuse us: she knows she should curb her inordinate taste for sweets; I have begged her. But she will obey no rules—the world is to obey them for her."

"That's exactly what Mother says about you! Exactly!"

"Vanya! For the last time!"

Half-audibly: "And I'm going to tell her you *hit* me, too!"

Abraham Irving sighed. "We will talk later," he promised Virgil.

At the shop, Vanya was turned over to the assistant, a young woman who amused her by combing her hair and being horrified about haunted houses.

As he showed Virgil around the shop, Mr. Irving continued his study of him. At last he said, "If I should tell you that you will offend me deeply by refusing to accept a gift, you would of course believe me?" And when that was granted: "And if I tell you that I can see you know quite a little about objects of art, merely by the way you look around, and that I will therefore be equally offended by your choosing an insignificant gift, you will of course believe me?"

"Now, really—"

Impatiently: "The return of that vixen— It is very hard to describe." Becoming thoughtful, solemn: "I see I must make a maudlin confession. Let us say—it is the truth—that there are only two people in this world whom I love. One is Vanya's mother, my sister—that one I cannot protect: she *courts* disaster, I believe. But for saving this other one from disaster—I simply cannot repay you. So unless you accept something of worth as at least a token—" Again, he started to gesture, but repressed the motion. His great dark eyes, tragic as if every aspect of life were tragic, spoke for him.

"You're excessively generous, really! By my standards, your concept of gratitude is exaggerated."

"By most standards, Mr. Benthwick, my concept of proper gratitude is exaggerated. Also of vengeance, incidentally. Nevertheless, they are my standards, and I shall not change them. Please make your selection." And, smiling, again so inscrutably: "And take care not to insult me by too modest a choice."

Virgil answered formally, dryly, that in such case he'd be delighted to oblige; yet what he chose was neither the thing he desired most, a splendidly expensive miniature from the eighteenth century, nor

what he desired next most, an exquisite pair of Sèvres vases, but instead what he should honestly have chosen third: the Degas ballet girl, a fifteen-inch pastiche cast in bronze.

Mr. Irving blanched—and stretched his hands toward the statue as though he would hide her.

Virgil stood quite still, with the greatest control. A full minute, comparable in length to five in the dentist's chair, elapsed.

"It is the one thing," Mr. Irving choked out, "it is the one thing in my shop I cannot permit you to have. This is inexcusable. You see this little black sticker here by the heel, it means—" But he seemed incompetent to say what it meant. "I had completely forgotten she was still here. I really cannot—"

Virgil wasn't angry or hurt, but he felt savage with contempt: he had after all been so far from asking for such embarrassment! Yet it occurred to him to forgive Abraham, to say, "Please select something for me, then," or to permit himself to understand there might be a dozen reasons why the Degas was not to be given away. But he rejected his own mind's entreaty for clemency even before it was made.

Earlier, he'd noticed on top one of the glass counters a tray containing book-matches; he went to it now, picked up a pack of matches, bowed to Abraham, and turned toward the door. He said nothing, but an ancient hostility between his blood and the blood of Irving's race bruited itself angrily from wall to wall of the shop. He was not even dismayed at the size of his loss: he should at least not have to be grateful now.

After standing statue-still for half a dozen instants, Mr. Irving rushed after him, not calling but instead silent.

A struggle took place between them on the street. Mr. Irving won, not for the reason of being stronger, but because his dread of being conspicuous was so much less than Virgil's.

When he'd got him inside the shop again, he still would not fully release him. He propelled him to a back room, stood before the door of it, brought out keys, unlocked it, waved Virgil in. He spoke softly, courteously, but as though he were keeping fury behind walls. "You despise me perhaps too soon, Mr. Benthwick. There might have been some other reason in my mind besides— The thing that—disconcerted me might possibly have been the *questionable* worth of the Degas, not its great value; did that ever occur to you? The truth of the matter is that the particular bronze you chose has not yet been

authenticated. We are not yet even sure it is the work listed in—various catalogues.” His eyes shone coldly, like glass under light. “If you had kidnaped my niece, I would have given my entire shop to get her back. So why should I object to rewarding you with even the best item in it?”

Virgil stared at him, less and less distantly, for several seconds. “This entire business seems to’ve become disproportionate. How you run your shop is your affair, but I’d be lying to say it doesn’t confuse me: you can’t part with the Degas, but on the other hand you said you didn’t even remember you still had it!”

Half-slyly, yet with certain superiority: “I contradict you. I said only whether she was still here. She might have been in some other place, no? Sold, or in a closet in my home? In a trash can in an alley, or on her way to the Vatican?”

Virgil started to answer, then checked himself. Two or three times before in his life he had known something sooner than it could logically be known. It was as if Abraham had been speaking in code, and he had understood the code without meaning to or being meant to. Righteous shock offered itself as the emotion properly to be felt. And he rejected it. Instead, he began to feel a smile creep uncontrollably over his face. The insolent pride of the Jew’s reasoning, the immeasurable rebellious contempt and furious honor in his mind, delighted him. Moment by moment, he felt more sure his guess was correct. Puzzled only by his own understanding, he stated rather than asked, though almost inaudibly, “She’s worthless, you’re saying? Perhaps your Degas is no Degas at all? You’d have taken my money for her without hesitation, if I’d come in off the street to buy her, but this was a case of rewarding the return of Vanya, and that could only be done with something of worth?” It seemed to him he had lived the scene before, or had himself been Abraham, so well did he understand the man’s mind.

Mr. Irving, staring at him with such intentness, asked gropingly, quietly: “You really dare to name me brigand?”

Virgil checked his own flush; answered in a politer tone: “I’m not meaning to do that, quite. You *did* say, ‘The *one* thing in my shop,’ after all—”

Perspiration began to form in tiny droplets on Abraham’s forehead. “Do I understand you—”

“Oh, come along, please, Mr. Irving: let’s not worry this thing.”

For now he was positive he was right. "I—I've never in my life set up to play the clergyman or the judge. And I *can* sympathize perfectly with the Vanya angle of it."

"But young man, you say if you had come in off the street, with money in your pocket, you believe I would have—sold—"

"But I didn't, Mr. Irving. And you didn't. As I say, let's not worry this thing. And what of it, after all? We both know it happens everywhere, every day."

Abraham shook his head. "No. I— You are wrong. If there are things I do for money, there are things I do *not* do for money."

Suddenly half-angry: "You'd not have sold it me?"

"No. No."

Virgil stared haughtily: "I say yes. Possibly with reluctance. But yes, certainly you would have!"

"No." And again the dark eyes spoke their ancient unassuaged tragedy. "Neither with reluctance nor without reluctance, Mr. Benthwick. Not at all. Can you believe me?"

Virgil tried; and almost succeeded; and failed. He had the impression there was some madness in the room.

"I think you *will* believe me, then. If I deliver myself," Abraham sat down—they had been standing face to face, not a yard apart, during the entire conversation—and cradled his head with his hands; "if I deliver myself," he repeated slowly. In a moment he rang for his assistant, had her bring in the pastiche. When she'd gone: "Mr. Benthwick, give me half an hour, and you will believe me. Because I am going to explain—for the first time in my life, to someone else, not to myself—what I can do for money and what I can not. And when I am finished, perhaps you will not despise me so much. Perhaps not at all. And who knows? Maybe we will even become friends."

The hour that followed colored itself so strangely Virgil could never discuss it, not even with McNaughton, although its dye ran over to all the rest of the days of his life.

"Sure, there's some things I'll do for money, and some I won't. Sure!" Gladys' voice was trembling. "I never said I'd do *anything* for money . . ." The little park they'd found to love and quarrel in—

Gladys and the focal point of her life—was green and beautiful, but often, like today, they saw it not at all.

"My Lord, I don't know what else there is to do for money, that'd be worse than that!"

"You don't know much, then."

"Oh naturally, there're things—worse things. O.K. But you know what I mean. You *know* you know what I mean, Gladys! What it does to your insides—"

"You want me to try to get taken on at Kress, don't you, Johnny? So I can unpack boxes all day long, six days a week, on my feet, an' dirty as the devil—"

"Talk about *dirty*!"

"And for what? For eight-ten dollars a week, at the most! That's for what! And a hundred white folks to tell me to hurry up ever' second, and at that it wouldn't even bring in enough to eat on—"

"Oh, come on! Ten dollars not enough to *eat* on!"

"Not to pay board and room and clothe yourself on, that isn't enough to eat on too, hardly, an' you know good and well what I meant."

They sat silently then, and as miserable as silent.

"Why couldn't you— Why couldn't you just—stay on a while yet?"

"With Uncle?"

"With him and your aunt. She counts too. She's your own mother's sister."

"I'll tell you why." She looked at him squarely. "Because there *are* some things I won't do for money, that's why. And if I have to listen to any more of his How-Wonderful I-Am's much longer, and be real grateful to boot, I think I'll *die*, I'll just go off my trolley!"

"You'll have to listen to a lot worse than that where you're going."

"Don't be dirty."

Again the gloomy silence.

"Will you care?" she asked, half-beseechingly; "will you care, *that* way— Will you keep thinking I'm doing something horrible all day long, so you won't want to have anything to do with me?"

"Gladys— Gladys, honey, you know—" And he ducked his head down, so that no one else in the park should see, and raised her hand to his lips.

She felt answered on that score, then, and undertook the next

phase of the battle. "Johnny, see, just even to start they'll give me eight dollars a week basic! And I can get that much again from tips, easy! And no clothes to buy: they furnish everything."

He groaned.

"They say the girl before me quit because she had enough saved to start a hot-dog place, hot-dogs and *tacos*, all kinds of Mexican food, mostly—"

"If it were anything *else*, if only it was something *else*!"

"Oh, Johnny, how can you talk like you know it's so horrible? You've never even been in one!"

"Don't be funny."

"And only every other month is night work, ten till six one month, and six till two one month. Johnny, be reasonable. It's the *nicest* place. It really is the very nicest place in town."

"I don't like any part of it. I hate it. I'm not going to let you do it, Gladys, I just don't care what you say!"

"Oh, good gravy! You make me tired! A person'd think it's a cat-house or something the way you act!"

He stared at her aghast. "Honcst to cripes! You keep saying the worst things today!"

She had to start to laugh at him—but stopped midway, as if interrupted by someone else, to mutter tenderly, "I love you. Oh, God, I do love you, Johnny Ruc!"

He leaned his head and shoulders toward her, and she responded automatically: raised her arms to encircle him, and protected his face from her own glance. He mumbled then from the secrecy of her throat, "It's the one thing that whenever I saw a colored person doing it in a white place I always thought I'd rather starve! It's the *one* thing!"

"Honey, let it be this way, then: if I feel anything's happening to me—because I know how you mean, exactly—I'll just up and quit and tell 'em to go to the devil. Johnny? Can it be like that? If I promise you: the very first *day* I know it isn't right for me?"

When she had dug the assent from him, he felt defeated, yet much better: the terrible moment of surrender was at least past. Her fingers, so very long, slender and light, stroked his head, neck, ears, compensating as well as they could with gratitude and love. He let himself be lulled, yet kept explaining to himself silently, kept insisting

silently that even if she did work at such a job for a while, even if she dressed in their uniform and cleaned their God damned toilet bowls, and handed them their God damned towels, and made herself act less than human, she still wouldn't *be* a women's room attendant. He compared his job at the bowling alley to this prospective one of hers: he wasn't *really* a pin boy, and someday he'd turn into what he really was, a painter.

Gladys, however, while touching him so carefully to communicate her love, took equal care not to let him guess her plans—because this little battle was only the first in a calculated campaign.

Silently, she considered her schedule: by next September she must have persuaded him not to return to college, in fact she must have persuaded him to do nothing but paint, paint, *paint* as he wished, and to come to live with her in whatever place she could find, and not to be stupid about whether it was he or she who brought in the money. And she felt not at all guilty about lying to him (as certainly she'd been resolved from the first to keep that job and to get those tips whether all the smug white cows made her life a hell on earth or not), because the very thing she loved most fiercely in him was the need he had, she'd found it right away, not to know certain truths.

"If you don't know something, Terrence, whether it's true or not, it simply isn't true. If you don't *know* a thing— See, if you really *do not know* a certain thing, it simply isn't so, for *you*," said Robb Nixon, desperately trying to explain to Terrence Collin, very pale, that ignorance was innocence. "Can't you get that? If, for example, I were color-blind—and it's really just plain luck I'm not, because a lot of albinos are—that dresser there and this bedspread would *not* be two different colors to me, they'd be the same! I wouldn't be lying, then, would I, if I told you they were the same color, if to me they *were* the same color?" Anxiously: "Now, Collin, answer me one way or the other. Would I, or wouldn't I, be lying?"

From the bed, a little mumble: "No."

"No! All right! So it's exactly the same with you. You had absolutely *no idea* that tripping a person on those stairs could conceivably result in the person's death. See? So—"

"He— He even tripped *me* on them once."

"He did?"

"Sure he did. He— He always liked to do things like that to me."

"Well, that's absolutely proof positive then! You yourself had been tripped on those very same stairs, and therefore you *knew* it wasn't really dangerous! So you just can't conceivably say you murdered him. That's asinine! But the point I'm trying to make is: you'd better *stop* saying it. Nobody with any sense would pay any attention to you, I'll admit; but, still, you might get yourself into a lot of trouble if you keep it up. Ah—ahhh, God!" He'd been standing, gesturing, going on at a great rate, but suddenly he sank onto the bed as if defeated, and then said in such a discouraged tone that even Terrence, deep in his own darkness, was touched: "Oh, merciful God, Collin, you're *such* a dumbbell, such a *hopeless* mutt sometimes!"

Terrence made a sound, inarticulately apologetic.

"The police will pick you up and work you over—I mean worse than what your father did—don't you see that? And you can't stand being worked over any more! You'll get to where *you* don't know *what* you're saying! Christ, I just don't know what to *do*!"

Terrence reached from under the coverlet and touched him on the arm. "I'm sorry, Nixon. Honestly, I am. I won't say that any more."

Robb seized the hand quickly and pressed it with all his might. Again, his voice took on energy, became persuasion itself. "You swear that, Collin? You *swear* that now?"

"I swear."

"You swear what?"

"That I won't say that any more."

"Won't say what?"

"That I—murdered him."

"And why *won't* you say it again?"

"Because—it was an accident."

"Yes." He relaxed his hand. "Now that's good. And about the blood, remember that of course you thought it was *your* blood. Don't you remember? You even said that much, when you told me about it."

"I did?"

"Oh, God: *yes!*" He stood up, firm again, and merely exasperated

rather than agonized. "Now you'd better get dressed and we'll go over there. Come on, now. And remember you don't have to know he's dead, at all. Because so far as that goes, even I don't *really* know who's dead."

Terrence stared, fixed, for a moment; then: "It's not my brother, it can't be Bud because he was in Sacramento. He's very healthy and he's real careful about everything, he always is, awfully careful. You should see how he drives."

Robb waited for Terrence to name his mother, but all he heard was a repetition: Terrence insisted it couldn't be Bud. Until this moment, Robb hadn't thought it possible that he could feel even to the fraction of a degree more protective or more passionately sympathetic toward Terrence than he already felt; now he discovered otherwise. He therefore ordered matter-of-factly, "Well, O.K., get up and get dressed, and let's go."

"You talk just like a Communist," Betty Nixon reproved George Morley, and felt so deeply shocked she drew his bedclothes over her charming nakedness. "Really! You talk exactly like a Communist!"

George, dressing, looked down at her contemptuously—she was in so many ways so perfectly, indeed so flamboyantly, satisfactory, that when she did fail him, in any way at all, he reacted with the special detestation only acute disappointment can engender.

"Come on," he ordered coldly, "get up, and get dressed. Let's go."

But this idea didn't suit her, either. She wouldn't stir.

When she hadn't yet known him to be wealthy, his contemptuous sullen ways had thrilled her, even inflamed her: she'd easily granted rudeness to be his right, simply through the powerful authority of sex, and she'd loved acquiescing to the female role. But now that she knew him to be who he was, now that she lay beneath such blankets as were not to be bought with her whole week's salary, a perverse pride and obstinacy sometimes seized her. She wasn't some girl of the lower classes, to be pushed down and then ordered away casually; she simply was *not*, no matter what he took her for. If his money impressed her, it by no means awed her; her self-love was strong enough for her to be covetous.

"Go to hell," she mumbled, faking a yawn. "Just go to hell. I'll get up when I'm damned good and ready."

Yet this very way of talking was something of a compensation. Girls of her own class rarely talked like this, and it felt brave to try; excepting those wretched creatures at the bottom of the social pyramid, only girls of George's class could handle coarseness, boldness, really well. She'd often admired them in the store; but only when she was with George—certainly never when she was at work or at home—could she imitate their insulting slouch and deep arrogant voices. Silent, she rehearsed impudently, "Just go to hell." She decided, next time, to lower the pitch and to drawl even more slowly.

Meanwhile, standing and dressed now, George forbade himself to remember how desirable she was (she continued to be desirable even now, when he was still fairly exhausted), and concentrated instead on how stupid she was.

They'd been discussing the "International Students' Strike Against War," a pacifist demonstration which high-school and college students had made recently by cutting classes at eleven o'clock on a specified day and gathering to announce, from the center of campus, that they'd never fight in any war for any cause. George had been telling Betty, enthusiastically, how he'd taken part in it by carrying a banner reading *DISARMAMENT NOW!* and by shouting, "War against war!" into a megaphone—and she had totally failed to recognize the wisdom and valor of his act. She'd even been inane enough to say, "My father says that that Intercollegiate Disarmament Council is Communist-inspired, and all that kind of thing is. You can't help being patriotic and wanting to fight for your own country. It's always been that way. Anyway, internationalism is basically unnatural."

"What?" His face had contorted with scorn. "Internationalism is basically *unnatural*?"

"Well, you know what I mean. It's natural for a person to love his own country best. The idea of internationalism is altruistic, but it doesn't fit in with human nature."

"Oh, God!"

"Don't act that way. I don't say anything any stupider than a lot of things you say."

"Listen— No, it's hopeless!— Well, try now: listen!" It was then he'd impatiently hauled himself up and started to find his clothes. "It isn't a question of loving anybody's country in the first place, see?

It's a question—just about entirely—of economic interests. Good God, don't you know anything about history? Do you think people go to wars because they love their country? People go because of economic interests! They dress it up in a lot of bull, but basically even Abraham Lincoln admitted even the Civil War was just fought for economic reasons, not really anything like 'Let's free the poor slaves so we can all be equal!' Don't you ever read anything? The Northerners *burned* the southern Negroes *alive*, and *shot* them when they'd come and ask to join the Union forces; they weren't fighting for *love*, you dope! They were fighting, basically, for *economic interests*!"

"Oh my goodness, that has nothing to do with *now*! That was so long ago most of those people weren't even civilized. Most of them couldn't even read."

"Oh my God! What about *now*, then? What about the World War? Even Woodrow Wilson—" He had stopped abruptly, realizing it was Wilson rather than Lincoln who'd confessed that the war he'd won had been launched for economic reasons. Sighing bitterly: "What did you major in, anyway? Cooking?"

"Oh, shut up." But that had stung a little, so she retaliated: "I learned one thing, anyhow, which seems to have passed *you* by: the whole depression was just caused by the terrible waste of the World War, and it taught economists and everybody, once and for all, that there is nothing to be gained by war, and all victories are Pyrrhic victories! Everybody loses. The whole idea of war is simply passé. So to go out and parade around now like a fool on campus and say, 'I won't fight, you can't make me,' is just too foolish for words." It was amazing, she'd discovered, how much you could get by with if you were sleeping with your date. Really, things were much more vivid this way. But when, instead of answering, he had merely stared at her contemptuously, she'd decided to change her tack: "Naturally, I respect anyone for trying to be idealistic and altruistic."

"Well, isn't that big of you!"

It occurred to her he just liked to fight more than she did; she began to lose interest.

It was then he suggested she get up and dress; and it was then she told him, in the voice she regretted as a shade too high and a beat too fast, to go to hell.

He pulled her up, not gently. "Come on. Get dressed."

Things weren't going at all as she'd planned. Betty felt she was being treated, after all, exactly like some little tramp he might be paying! She tried to slap him furiously in the face: she *would* establish herself! And when this only amused him enough to insult her by making a vulgar noise with his lips, her rage became passionate. Her fists were nothing: she must rely on words. "What are *you*, then, anyway, but just the big fat coddled baby of all those 'economic interests' that a hell of a lot better men than you fought and died for? What in hell are *you*? You're the parasite of parasites! You've never earned a dime in your life, and I guess about the only way you ever could would be to dig ditches! And, anyway, if you were so damned noble you wouldn't even be *living* here on the money your father and grandfather and great-grandfather made at all, because everybody knows *how* they made a lot of it!"

Involuntary: both the slap and the force of it.

When he saw the imprint of his hand upon her face, he gasped, and his own lost color.

Fallen on the bed, crumpled, she sheltered her head in her arms and lay quite still: she was fighting silently and very hard against a flood of tears.

It seemed to them both a terrible thing had happened, and for a whole minute they were shocked speechless. It seemed that an evil presence had entered the room and had changed them: Betty had become and she would forever remain a woman who'd been slapped violently in the face, knocked down in nakedness by her lover, whom both of them began to see as somehow thick or brutal or ugly in a way entirely new.

She could not sob; she would not let herself.

And he was as unable to move: self-loathing had frozen him.

Gradually, it became clear to him: he simply could not live with himself any longer, unless he changed, corrected himself.

Suddenly as shy and clumsy as a bear, he gathered her in his arms and rocked her back and forth on the bed, silently.

At first she made her body dead, because there was more loathing in that than in pushing him away.

But gradually—and almost independently of him—his animal warmth, the comforting flawless vitality of his physique, began making an appeal to her, as if it at least should be forgiven.

Against her will, a feeling of contentment grew in her. She had not felt so richly safe, so omnipotently protected, since childhood.

When she started to say that she ought not to have talked like that to him, he interrupted half-belligerently to give the order, in a voice quite itself again, sullen, "You and I're going to get married, Betty."

The only surprise she felt was at feeling no surprise. She nodded solemnly, her head against his chest. The beating of his heart was right, she thought, not excited like some fool's, but steady and not too loud.

Robb Nixon tried to whistle, once or twice, on the way to the Collin house, but gave it up. Terrence said nothing. They kept a perfectly steady pace, as steady and slow as the march of men on their way to the gallows.

When they came to the house, Terrence turned and spoke solemnly: "Good-by, Nixon. Thanks a million."

Robb offered to stay, to go inside with him, hating himself for hoping to be refused. And when he saw Terrence looking at him so eagerly in the semidarkness, as if searching to see whether the offer had been meant sincerely, he felt unbearably ashamed of himself. He took him boldly by the arm and together they started toward the door.

"Nobody has a right to expect so much from anyone," Terrence said. "I never really did. Even when I came to your place Saturday night, I just thought you might let me stay there that one night, that was all. All— All this—" he gestured, unable to manage the lump in his throat. He had not tried to put his gratitude into words before, not once in the last forty-odd hours: his cause for gratitude seemed too vast for words. He broke off, would have entered the house quickly. But the door was locked. For a moment he felt miraculously reprieved. Yet he valiantly set to rapping, the tempo of his beat desperate but brave.

An odd sensation visited Robb as he waited by Terrence's side. It was as if a hundred needles, hot with acid, were being thrust into his vital parts. He clenched his hands into fists, though they lacked so

much of being a real fighter's fists. His eyesight and temperament had always kept him from learning much about fighting, but now he resolved to hit however he could, to kick, to choke, to gouge—he resolved fiercely there'd be nothing at all he wouldn't try, if, when the door was opened, whoever opened it began hurting Terrence.

The woman who opened it was in her forties, with stringy greasy hair. For the first time in years, the similarity between her features and her younger son's was apparent: she had lost at least half a dozen pounds within the last two days; sleeplessness and tears had made her eyes fever-large and bright; the shadows of exhaustion pointed up a basic delicacy in the structure of her face; and suffering had gentled her lips. "Oh, it's you," she said. "We wondered where you was." She stood staring at them for a moment, dumbly. She didn't notice Robb's being an albino: everything had become strange to her, and much was monstrous. "You better tell your friend we're sorry but this is no time for having people around. Can't you see the—crepe—here on the door?" Her voice, always listless, was unimaginably without tone or spirit of any sort. She tried to say, "Your father's dead," but the words came out brokenly: she had begun crying again.

Terrence's voice was just as ragged. "Mom! Mom!" He tried to reach toward her, to comfort her if he could—but the old basic revulsion her very scent and sight had always held for him rose up between them, too great even now to be ignored. He forced himself to embrace her, but with a gesture so devoid of warmth it convinced no one, neither her, nor Robb, nor himself.

Bud appeared at the door, strong, quiet; there was maturity in his youth. His eyes became, for the one long moment they held Terrence's, astonishingly—indeed almost frighteningly—articulate. Overnight he had grown into a judging god—compassionate rather than angry, but all-knowing.

A cry broke from Terrence and he flung himself upon his brother with a convulsive motion passionate as a child's, and as self-forgetful.

Strong arms, a workman's arms, held him—firmly, yet not close. Their touch gave him the promise of forgiveness, but nothing at all of comfort or love; instantly sensitive to this lack, Terrence raised his head to stare into his brother's face. Immediately he understood that he himself had also somehow died here.

They separated themselves; to be separate forever. Of all things,

Terrence had not expected this. He felt the swift aloneness cruelly; it was next to unendurable.

Then a glance, almost as long, between the brother and Robb.

Robb saw him as Terrence in granite. And then, in some way almost weird, the conviction grew that Bud was deciding, as he looked at Robb, to give him Terrence.

When it was ended, Bud said, "Let's go in," plainly including Robb. Mrs. Collin made no protest: she'd obey him from now on.

The corpse lay to be viewed.

Though his mother urged him, Terrence would not approach it. When she went on insisting more or less excitedly, Robb quickly went to stand within a few inches of him.

Bud—again with some strange compassion and all-knowingness new in him—intervened to say, "It's all right, Terry. He looks all right. You'll wish later you seen him. Go ahead." The stern quietness of his voice made him easily obeyed.

As Terrence walked toward the corpse, Robb looked questioningly at Bud. When he was given the glance that permitted and even urged him also to approach the bier, he knew positively he'd been right in imagining that Bud had tried, as if with some invisible solemn ceremony, to make him Terrence's keeper. Everything seemed impossible and yet, at once, right. If he could not conceive of his own family's behaving this way, meeting death this way, neither could he imagine their meeting it at all.

Mr. Collin dead and clean and barbered, with facial muscles skillfully relaxed and adjusted and rearranged, turned out to be astonishingly good-looking. For the first time, he was not awkward in a suit. He wore an expression (bits of stiffened cotton) of contentment and kindness. His last thoughts might have been profoundly philosophical; they quite certainly couldn't have been less than benign.

The boys stared, oblivious, fascinated.

And then for the first time Robb found a detail other than right: there was no emotion coming from Terrence.

When he directed his gaze from the body to his friend, what he saw astonished him. Terrence's face wore an avid, slightly inhuman expression Robb knew well: it meant he was memorizing the subject of a painting.

Later in the evening Robb learned with irony that the lie he'd told

his parents had been the truth, since two or three Collin relatives actually had come to stay at the house, and Terrence's bed was in fact taken by them. When he suggested that Terrence return home with him, nobody objected. It became increasingly clear to him that no one had ever really considered Terrence part of the family anyway.

Mr. Collin had been, after all, as loved and respected as most men. By this, the second day of his death, he had attained almost the status of a hero, a legend, for his family: Mrs. Collin remembered how he liked to sing, what strength he had, and she wept for her misery. The brother saw an old briar pipe, not to be used again, and picked it up and said, "I'm keeping this"; and then had to blow his nose rather violently. The bride-to-be cried as hard as anyone: the man's great maleness had always made her heart run quick, and whenever they'd battled with each other at the card table, his very taunting had given her a promise of joy. They turned from Terrence in precisely the degree they turned toward the dead man's memory. Terrence was not necessary to them; he wasn't even there.

Bud explained, more to Robb than to Terrence, that Mr. Collin had fallen on the cellar stairs; and, "I guess he'd had a drink or two. Not drunk. But enough to miss his footing, the doctor said."

Terrence started to say something, but the words weren't clear. To establish the point, Robb asked, "The steps—were they dangerous?"

"Yeah, I guess. Terry here fell on 'em just a couple weeks ago, anyway. Didn't you?"

"Yeah. Listen, I was here— I came home that afternoon."

Bud interrupted, in a tone that told him to be still and to listen carefully, "We figured you was here. And that he must've worked you over some for that—that thing," he jerked his thumb in the direction of their bedroom, "and when you didn't come home two nights running, we thought you must be pretty scared he'd go for you again. Right?"

"He— I—"

"Right?" And this time the special tone and look got through to Terrence: *Don't bring us any more trouble than we've got right now. Whatever happened, happened, and there's nothing to be gained.* "You ran away?"

"I—ran away."

"That was too bad, that thing you—done of us. It was the last thing he ever got to see," Mrs. Collin complained dully.

"What—what thing?"

Bud again gestured toward their bedroom. Remembering, for the first time, the charcoal he'd finished weeks ago, "Oh," Terrence said. And slowly: "Oh."

And his brother, even more slowly: "Yeah. 'Oh.'"

Then the quick flood: "Listen, he didn't have to get so mad. You don't have to get mad, or hurt, or anything. Everybody paints and draws just the way they can, that's all anybody can do. We don't even try to make things come out just the way they look; why do anything at all if that's all you're going to do, why not just take a snapshot? So I wasn't trying to show how *you* were, really, I was just trying to give an impression, a sort of mood thing—"

"It's all right, Terry. Nobody cares. Nobody cares at all."

His voice was so bored and dead that Terrence moaned the begging: "Oh Jesus, Jesus, *please* believe me! Please believe me!" He was not answered.

The girl whom he'd revealed—though without entirely understanding what he was doing—as a prostitute, spoke for the first time since the boys' arrival. Wct-cyed, she attacked her fiancé: "A whiney little sissy kid you was always going out of your way to help!"

"That's enough now," Bud told her in a gentle voice. "That's enough. He's different than us. He always was and he always will be different than us."

"I'm sure glad I'm different than him!" and she swept from the room.

Mrs. Collin left them too; she reapproached the coffin.

Terrence begged of his brother: "Listen. Listen, you got what I was saying, didn't you? That I wasn't trying to show *you*, not really?—Bud? You believe me, don't you?"

"I'd believe you fine, except," looking down at his own hands, "just for one little thing, Terry: I got eyes."

Robb cleared his throat—rather desperately, for he'd just commanded himself to try to give a lecture on artists' liberties with reality. "When Picasso shows somebody as having three eyes and two noses and maybe just one tooth, Mr. Collin, surely you don't imagine he's trying to say that the person really—"

Bud smiled. "Did you see it? The one he done of us?"

"No. No, but—"

"Mom tore it up. She put it with the others *he* must've tore up. Otherwise I'd show it to you. But what I don't get is: why *not* just take a snapshot then? Like he just said, see? Instead of doing that to people?"

Robb groped for words; Terrence sat mute.

"Hell, I don't care. In fact, it's interesting to see what he thought of us all along. But, naturally, this I can premise: he's on his own now." Bud pulled out a wallet and took most of the money from it, thirty dollars. "Here, kid," he handed it to Terrence—who protested. Bud insisted: "I wouldn't turn a dog loose in this world without at least thirty dollars. So go ahead and take it; you'll need it, believe me. You can say it's from your first customer, satisfied or not."

He stood, permitted himself for the last time to rumple, in one instant's sweep, the golden-brown curly hair; and turned his back on them and went to join his mother.

Walking home, Robb felt the loneliness (or what seemed to him now a sort of congenital isolation) in Terrence as acutely as if it throbbed within himself. He thought, in a dozen different ways, of how he might comfort him; and rejected them all as cheap, too easily misunderstood, or as mere clumsy intrusions. He saw that the separateness he'd always felt toward his own family was after all a comparatively minor thing: he was different from them in degree, or in texture, but hadn't been made at the very beginning from an entirely dissimilar stuff. He looked at Terrence, walking beside him in the darkness, and for some reason—though he was only moderately fond of poetry—a line of Swinburne's tumbled through his mind: . . . *like a soul belated, In hell and heaven unmated, By cloud and mist abated, Comes out of darkness morn.* . . .

His hand fastened itself on Terrence's sleeve.

And this—the touch—seemed right. Terrence pressed his elbow to his side, as if reassuring himself of the friendship in Robb's gesture. Gradually, the carriage of his shoulders became less dispirited, his step a trifle more confident. They returned as they'd come, in complete silence.

Even when they were in Robb's house, in his room, the silence

continued. Robb had never before understood anyone so well; this evening had let him see into Terrence utterly. And the experience half-frightened him, or at least disturbed him: had he the right, had anyone the right?

As he did nearly every night, Terrence tried to make some bit of a sketch before going to bed. Robb changed into his pajamas, got into bed, and with the aid of the bedlamp tried to study one of his textbooks. He chose one on the technique of teaching; a deadly dull thing, cruelly dull. Yet he'd chosen it deliberately, because since Terrence had been there he'd found it difficult to sleep.

As Terrence worked, or tried to work, Robb (his eyes obediently reading word after word) began investigating a recent phenomenon of his own mind—a tendency toward nightmare. He had not had nightmares since childhood, not once till now.

And these weren't precisely, they weren't altogether, as he remembered nightmares.

His custom upon retiring had for a long time been—something he'd not have confided to a twin soul—to think about the one real love affair of his life, that affair of two years past, and to remember in exquisite detail the mood of happiness, so intense as to approach pain, which the very presence of the woman, Dorothy, had always given him. He remembered everything about her, almost devoutly—the kindness of her smile and the warmth of her voice; her unconventionality, her courage; he remembered her as he'd first met her, as his homely, freckled, thick-egg'd, too-young, charming art teacher; he remembered his first visit to her mountain cabin, and how she had put him at ease by confessing herself to be "strangely beset by qualms. . . . Have I turned into a corrupter of *youth* or something, do you suppose? . . . And by the way, if you're a virgin, please tell me and don't worry: tonight you can sleep by the fire, and I'll take the bedroom, and we'll be as pure as soap!" He always remembered her laugh, the flight and joy of it; and it was his custom, nearly every night, to recall even the scent of the pine cones they'd gathered, even the sound of the wind and rain they'd listened to, warm on the hearth. Habit permitted him without embarrassment to recall their courtesy for each other during their every moment in bed, and he remembered—again, almost reverently—the softness of her body, a haven. Then he usually fell asleep, for his thoughts never included her return to her husband. But lately, the nightmares: he'd begun

dreaming of Dorothy as if she were unpleasant or distasteful to him in some vile but unknown way. She had strings of hair on her chin, in these nightmares, half a foot long. When he went to take her in his arms, she fought with him. She shrieked, and her eyes shone like a demon's; she clawed at his face with nails of a wicked length, grown from hands absurdly small. Also, she had somehow become the same person as the "dark little Marxist fem" whose father had been deprived of his pick-up; yet larger, stronger, and fighting. She had become muscular, he must eat her sinews for his own strength; and some obscene secret lay between them: whenever there was a chance of being observed, they set to embracing each other fervently, yet with a sly grimace one for the other; and as soon as they were alone, hostility. . . . He moaned in these nightmares, he broke out in sweat; even Terrence had been awakened.

I'll ask McNaughton, he thought. I'll tell him everything about the nightmare part, and nothing of the other—about Dorothy—and see what he makes of it. He always reads so much of that Freudian hokum, he'll have some theory.

And, putting down the book, which had been written as though simplicity were the most grievous sin excepting only clarity, he yawned deliberately, persuading himself with every second that he'd sleep well tonight.

His eyes caught sight of Terrence, working at the desk. Apparently Terrence—a thing that certainly wouldn't be unusual for him—had started to undress for bed but had then been struck with another idea for a sketch. His shoulders were bare. Shadows hid the bruises and the light rested warm on his profile; he worked lost, intent— And he had been designed, Robb saw it with the old familiar exultant joy, by an artist not afraid of beauty.

Something quick and sharp like a fast-hurled tiny stone attacked the region of his heart, but even at the instant of acknowledging the greatness of the hurt, Robb could not name it. He yawned even more elaborately, took off his glasses, pulled up the covers, buried his head in the pillow.

"I'm sorry," Terrence said, suddenly noticing him. "I'm awfully sorry. I'm keeping you awake. I can do this just as well tomorrow."

In the bed, his excited whisper: "Listen, Nixon—I mean if you're awake—I think I figured out something, or at least I think I started

to figure it out: how you can show that somebody just has make-up on, and it isn't really his own color, not the blood underneath the skin but just sort of on in layers on top. I think I can show *you* how to do it tomorrow too, if you want to try it; I've got it down pretty good, I think."

Robb recalled the dead man's cosmetic, and almost shuddered with embarrassment—and yet, in a moment more, he admitted to himself he couldn't find it really wrong of Terrence to be thinking so.

Then, for some reason, he remembered how, months before, Terrence had once desperately tried to persuade both Johnny Rue and George Morley to take two or three minutes to look at things "upside-down and sideways" before recording them, and strangely, it was at *this* memory he felt the scalding wave of irritation he'd have imagined proper only for what Terrence had just said. He began to feel such confusion he grew afraid, almost of himself.

He wasn't subject to this sort of mood—just as he hadn't been subject to nightmares—before Terrence; and the very unusualness of his bafflement irritated him the more. "Is that a fact? You're quite the little old art teacher, aren't you, kid?" he burst out crossly, in a tone and manner utterly uncharacteristic. Rather deliberately to ease itself, his mind began blaming Terrence passionately (yet with a passion he admitted even at the instant of its height to be a very foreign passion) for not having cared more about his family, for not having shouted on the streets and to the skies that he'd tripped his father on those stairs—finally blamed him even for being of a body boned so, proportioned so, colored so, for being of a face that smiled so, of hair that curled so, yes—even for being—

Yet when Terrence, surprised, hurt, turned to ask, "Nixon?" of the darkness, and "Did I say something wrong?" Robb felt his own spirit surge with an agony of tenderness and all-forgiving love.

He had to groan, bitter, inarticulate: "No, Collin, of course not. Go to sleep, be quiet."

And then had to stop his mouth with his hand: because at the breaking of the wave he had seen deeply into himself; he had seen, within the flashing mercury of a one-thousandth of a second, what he knew couldn't possibly be there. He lay quite still.

• He lay scorched and dumb and paralyzed.

Everyone was talking about it: the skies had gone insane, and had sent northern California, in May, the scorching sort of day Death Valley knows in June.

Betty Nixon lay floating on her back in the Morley swimming pool and felt the coolness of the water like money around her, money and the promise of money, and the comfort of money. If she were rich, and she was soon to be rich, she would do nothing on such days as these, or on any other day, except precisely what she wished. She would not speak and she would not move except for pleasure. And she would not be lazy.

She looked up at the diving board and saw George poised for yet another dive. He couldn't rest; it seemed to her he could do nearly everything but rest. He had to be diving or treading water or hurtling himself along in bounds like an agitated frog; and it wasn't because he was nervous or restless, it was simply that he didn't tire. It had always been fine to watch him, but now she thought it especially fine, with knowing she'd so shortly own him. Such a splendid beast. "Our splendid, powerful animal," Robb sometimes called him, all accurately. She lay on her back and floated.

He disappeared from sight. She closed her eyes.

She opened them again to see her feet being captured by one of his arms, to watch herself being hauled to the shallow part of the pool where, she knew from experience, she was to be whirled about rapidly, faster and faster, her feet in his grasp, her head dizzying. She thought of protesting: he was not gentle. But then screamed only slightly. Their bodies were in such agreement she couldn't pretend annoyance convincingly. Even his roughness was her pleasure. Whether in this sport or in the sport of making love, his exuberance was valid, selfish; he did nothing primarily for her. Her joy was only a by-product of his, and she knew it; but she knew it was also the more joyous, released, and animal for being merely that. Sometimes, rarely, he touched her gently, or tenderly kissed her, or held her as though she seemed fragile to him, and it was only at these moments that his love didn't thrill her: she thought he might be pitying her; or they would wake up middle-aged. And she wanted to preserve her own hardness. They were best together without too much softness or dependence.

"Beast, beast!" She drowned in laughter, surrendering to dizziness. When he'd released her, they climbed up to the tiled lap of the pool where she rested, half-panting.

He seized her bathing cap and threw it into the water, calling it an affectation.

"How's a cap any more of an affectation than a suit?" she wanted to know.

"What're you saying? That you want to be stripped?"

"No. But how is it?"

"Why, a suit's not an affectation at all; it serves a genuine purpose. It conceals distractions. If distractions weren't concealed, no swimming. Consequent loss of health and vigor."

"You sound a little like that fool McNaughton."

"If McNaughton is a fool, my dear Miss Nixon, you—you are merely an empty eggshell."

"How kind of you!"

"I could've been even kinder."

After a pause, almost wistfully: "D'you imagine you'll always be so unpleasant, George? All through the years? On our golden wedding anniversary and so on?"

"I'm pleasant as hell, except when you belittle your intellectual betters."

"Intellectual *bettors*? That—poet!" Indignantly adjusting a shoulder strap: "For all I care, you can go to—Afghanistan on our golden wedding anniversary!"

"O.K. I'll book passage tomorrow. By the way, where'll you be?"

The moment struck her as appropriate for conciliation: his neck was a strong column, and she marked invisibly a point near its base as the next to be bitten. She offered truce, her eyes shadowed with invitation: "Oh, surrounded by Afghans, I suppose."

He laughed his pleasure. "Good wench! Which reminds me, I think there's a small booking office right around the corner. Conveniently located."

And he picked her up expertly, lightly, and carried her into one of the pool's little dressing rooms, a cabaña they'd used before and which he'd provided with a great air-filled water raft.

• He possessed her as he usually did, wordlessly, with a calm that

was all passion. He took her past helplessness, far beyond consciousness of self; and brought her at last to where no time existed except the moment.

Inevitably, they made the journey back separately; but as slowly as possible.

She felt surprised to discover that tears had run across her face; sight of the pinch-marks her fingers had left on his shoulders, so powerful beside her, delighted her almost to shuddering. Marveling with pleasure as if she'd not seen it before, she studied the rest of his body meticulously, down through the clean hardness of his hips and legs, even to the toes on his heavy-modeled feet. "Such a splendid beast!"

When her gaze reached the bathing suits discarded on the floor, she was reminded of their setting: a private swimming pool. *His* swimming pool; or at any rate, almost his swimming pool—his father's. Therefore, almost *her* swimming pool. Her brain seemed to tingle with astonishment, the way it always did whenever she let it think, count: she was to have so much! Not only this marvelous body with its gift of periodic heaven, but, besides, gowns and jewels and furs and cars and servants! She would have deference shown her on the street, in shops! A magic name that was her name would be listed in the politest columns of newspapers; it would be printed again and again, dark and proud, in lists of sponsors of symphony orchestras, charity balls, art exhibits. She decided to conceal from no one that once, long ago, she'd been an office worker—

Unwillingly, she remembered her boss at the store, Mr. Trotter, and that tomorrow was another working day. Him and his silly "pretty little kitty!" She scorned him suddenly, as intensely as if for hundreds of years her blood had been above his, her name always the magic name. Yet, furiously, she admitted that not long ago she'd considered marrying him—and had even wondered if she might *hope* to marry him! His polite storekeeper's voice, his unctious petty timid body! She felt real humiliation to remember they'd ever kissed.

To push away the memory, she seized George by the hair and pulled it slightly, waking him from his semidoze. "I love you."

"I know it."

"I love you very much. Do you still want to marry me?"

"Sure."

"When?"

"Any time."

"Well, get me a ring then, please. An emerald, square-cut. Or baguet. Darling, do you hear me? I don't want to announce it until we have the ring."

He opened an eye to stare at her curiously. "You kidding?"

"Kidding? Certainly I'm not kidding."

To himself, marveling: "Christ! She wants a *wedding* ring yet!"

"What's so ridiculous about that? Anyway, I meant an engagement ring."

"An engagement ring! Even worse."

"What— What d'you mean, George? What on earth do you mean?"

He propped himself on his elbow to scowl at her the better, his old contempt unsheathed. "I simply mean, my dear empty eggshell, that people don't go out and buy engagement rings. All that rot. Not people who are people."

She pondered. "You mean you want me to have your mother's? Or what?"

"My *mother's*! Good God!" Supine again: "That was burned when they cremated her, anyway, as I remember."

"Well, what do you mean then, George?"

"I mean it's absurd. People don't go around wearing wedding rings. Or only Republicans do, anyway; and chorus girls to show off. Or completely unenlightened housewives. It's a symbol of bondage, Betty—a hopelessly dated kind of thing. Don't you know that?"

She pondered again. After a while, she had to decide he was probably right. It was very likely the same kind of thing as the way he'd always called his mother by her nickname, Darl', while she herself had never even known anyone who did that.

There'd probably be a good many things on that order to watch out for, many mistakes a girl could make no matter how careful she was. George would never care. But the Vassar witches, the Bryn Mawr bitches—they'd be glad to claw her to shreds for them. How they'd hate her, anyway, for stealing such a prize! She must be very careful.

She started to draw on her suit and was about to say, "Well, all right, my beast. All right: no ring," when he prevented her with a kiss and pushed away the suit with his foot.

Yet as her body began its acquiescence to him, her mind changed course: the word "Republican" began repeating itself warningly to her. Her breast swelled to his touch, the rhythm began, but that word would not fade: it was a clarion, telling her more clearly, instant by instant, that the ring was important, even vital, well worth fighting for. He had not been speaking properly, from the standpoint of fashion or class as she'd supposed; not at all. He'd been talking again, horribly, just like a Communist.

For the first time, she felt a twinge of anxiety about his father, whom she scarcely knew, but knew enough to respect. She saw the two of them turned out, homeless, George and herself—even saw wealth reduced to the weight of this great body upon her own.

She caressed his neck, but with distracted passion.

Marion McNaughton, that same day, that same torpid moment, sat propped against a tree and caressed the grass distractedly, with fretful languor. He'd fled his home several hours earlier and regretted helplessly that the flight must be so temporary.

The reason had been a frightful quarrel with his mother: she'd kept urging him, with what he thought a horrible gentleness, to consider becoming a librarian, and he'd kept shuddering and shaking his head, and when she'd demanded what he had against the idea, he'd answered, "Only that it leaves me limp with dreariness! Only that if I ever have to do that to keep alive, I shall say every day, every hour, 'Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; the world has grown gray from thy breath'; every hour, every day," and the insult to her profession had so angered her she'd quite forgotten to disdain passion and had screeched, trembling, that perhaps he didn't know it but *both* Mrs. Johnston *and* Mrs. Adams had suggested to her recently—just as nicely as they knew how, but she could have *died*—that he might not be altogether *right*, because it wasn't natural for a young man to go around muttering to himself the way he did and saying, when he would condescend to talk to anyone, the kind of things he said, and they'd suggested he might do well to see a—a— And then she'd faded into tears, and a muted, lady's sobbing. His embarrassment had been profound: their next meeting would be as difficult,

after such a contretemps, as if either of them had accidentally surprised the other nude. He'd fled to the campus.

Within a few feet of McNaughton's sheltering tree, stood Virgil Benthwick engrossed in copying the Campanile. He thought it ugly, crooked and preposterous. The madman, the wood-loving bat by whose care Virgil's mother supported the Sire and himself, had just died, and this death foretold such a fearful tragedy of deprivation that there was no speaking of it, not even to McNaughton. He and his mother had spent the previous evening discussing (in whispers, because such things were never brought before the Sire) where they should find money for bread now, and they had ended by finding no solution, no solution at all. Virgil would be graduated within weeks, a fact they called their only hope, but just to Mrs. Benthwick was it really much of a hope: Virgil had to fake his cheerfulness about it, remembering that in June the whole San Francisco Bay area would be deluged with university and college graduates.

There was public relief, of course.

But when Virgil read of suicides in the newspaper he respected the pride behind them wholly, having promised himself a hundred times he'd starve before he'd accept government charity. And the thought of giving pauper's bread to the Sire was simply inconceivable. He couldn't even toy with that idea. He copied the Campanile.

A yard away, his eyes closed, his mouth smiling, lay Johnny Rue, glutted with the sun. Glutted; but not mastered by it, as was McNaughton. Johnny drank in the warmth, let his body fairly purr with it. His mind had almost to stretch itself to realize the happiness he felt. The atmosphere he floated on was as rich and deep, as soft and invulnerable as a drug addict's cloud. Last night Gladys and he had made love, for the first time completely. Nothing held him to the ground but habit.

Terrence Collin, folded in two, sat on a bench. His hands made a cradle between his knees; his head rested in this cradle. It was an asking for mercy, but yet a pose as unconscious as eloquent.

Robb Nixon was sitting as far away as possible from Terrence, trying to study for a test in Education. He was beginning to be used to his battle, it had gone on so long. Only two things about it still astonished him: one, that it was so hard and so constant, harder than any battle he'd ever known, with never a break in it, not one moment

to rest except for the hours of sleep; and the other, that no one could see anything whatever going on, neither McNaughton nor Benthwick nor his own family nor—but it was a large part of the battle not to think of him at all—Terrence himself.

None of them was here by choice. They were all waiting for McNaughton to announce the order of business.

"Brethern," he at last began, "we are gathered here today to lend succor to the most unsuccored in our entire benighted midst."

"Or not to lend succor," Virgil muttered blackly. "I haven't so much as a sugar-tit."

"Vulgar, a vulgar jest. No. We must be like Rotarians, more. Truly. Our own dear boy—"

"Oh, don't call me that!" Terrence begged.

Everyone looked at him in surprise.

McNaughton said, "Nonsense. Of course I'll call you that: that's your name. Mustn't get notions"; and continued calmly, resolving never again to call him that, "Good brethern, the questions have come up, and must be answered: how do we feed him, where do we keep him?"

Everyone regarded Terrence, sympathetically. He examined the ground between his feet.

McNaughton continued, still the preacher: "We must, of course. To pretend otherwise is simply a lie put in our hearts by the devil. A tempting, tempting lie. Suggestions? Come now; who will lead us?"

Virgil: "What's wrong with immediate mummification?"

McNaughton stared at him curiously, wondering what caused today's gross lack of harmony in him.

From Terrence: "I can go in the C.C.C."

Robb, involuntarily: "No. No, he can't."

Johnny Rue suggested, "You can for the last thing, Collin. Let's keep that for the last thing."

"Good," McNaughton nodded. "Very good."

"No," Virgil said. "If it comes to that, we can all give up every fourth meal to him, and let him sleep in our beds every fourth night. Because that isn't the last thing, that's after the last thing. The C.C.C. is precisely the same as the dole."

There was the bitterness of an old man in his voice, and everyone heard it. The defiant, even desperate independence of his words

brought them all closer together, in just one moment, than they'd ever been before. They mumbled, "Yeah," "That's right," and "Hear! Hear! Down with the government and motherhood!" But it had been understood: they were solving the problem themselves.

McNaughton inquired, "Nixon, how much longer? At the outside, how much longer can you resist?"

"The pressure's getting pretty rough, McNaughton. The pressure's—awful," Robb mumbled, and thought how often now a single phrase went two directions.

"But how long would you say before the ultimatum? The stern parental ultimatum?"

Robb shrugged. "A week, maybe."

McNaughton faced Terrence. "How about that Mrs. Galmayer?"

Terrence gulped. "She's a Christian Scientist now. She doesn't believe in death any more. I tried to tell her, McNaughton, but you can't—I can't get *through* to her! Anyway, she's getting awfully tight with her money. She has this Belgian organist, now, anyway, and they play music together a lot."

"Your days are numbered?"

Terrence's head went back between his knees again.

Johnny said, "To hell with her," and used an expression in connection with Mrs. Galmayer and the Belgian that neither Robb nor Virgil had ever heard before and that McNaughton had only read.

Then Johnny took a giant step, assuring himself Gladys and his father would understand. "I can give—I'll give—I'll bring him one dollar ever' week," he stated, and held his breath.

The silence seemed as thick and as long as a tall tree.

Robb knew it for what it was—a sudden love among them all for Johnny—and was not the only one to know it. He was the only one, though, to see that Johnny would not know it, and that each instant might be more terrifying than the last. Very calmly, he gave the promise: "Put me down for two, McNaughton. And when I can, I'll make it three."

Virgil then, mock-dramatically, bitterly, to Terrence: "For my part, I'll make a vow: you'll not want for shirts and socks, at any rate, old chap! Not while these two hands can steal!"

McNaughton, staring lost at Virgil, mumbled absently to Terrence: "And from me, God's humble helper: spiritual counsel free. As long

as I can keep it from the Bishop." And he continued staring at Virgil, only half-aware of the beginning numbness of his own shock. For in memory he saw the Sire's brown velvet smoking jacket, and the gold felt slippers on those narrow feet. He was admitting, degree by degree, that he knew Terrence would quite truly wear fine socks, and at last his body fell into a little trembling, as surprised as if he'd just plunged it into melting ice.

But Robb continued impatiently with their common problem. "O.K. Three or four dollars a week, and an occasional marked-down article of clothing, that's what we have so far. So where's he going to stay? Wouldn't that much money just about pay for his food? If it would, could he stay with you—for a while, anyway—McNaughton? Would your mother have a spasm?"

"Not at all. She'd merely make our lives a veritable hell on earth. By sighing. She can achieve wonderful effects by sighing. A marvelously economical artist."

Johnny suggested timidly, "What about Morley? He'd be glad to help. I know he'd be tickled to death. Got that great big house an' all, y'know . . . He even offered *me* a loan once, did I ever tell you all?"

Virgil and McNaughton both glared at him: it seemed incredible that anyone could have so little feeling for propriety. "Quite!" they said; and, "Indeed?"

But Robb attacked them furiously with: "Well, what's ^{it}wrong? It's the same thing I've been thinking, but you guys make anybody afraid to say anything. What's so horribly wrong with it?" And when they wouldn't answer him: "You're such God damned snobs! And you make us all that way! You, Benthwick; and you, McNaughton—you make us all such damned snobs we'd suffocate before we'd blow our noses!"

Virgil addressed Terrence coldly: "Perhaps you'd have something to say, eh? Get your eyes up off the ground, Collin! Look up, now!" And when he'd been obeyed he continued: "D'you want charity? Is that what you'd like?— Because you can have it, you know—and Nixon actually seems to be advising it—if you've a taste for it. All you have to do is to be able to bear the stench of it."

Terrence saw—it hadn't been easy, but he had seen it for a long time—that while help from them would not be charity, help from

George would be. And no matter how dimly, he saw also that he'd be irreparably disgracing all of them (separately, he himself had always been too far past disgrace to be affected) by accepting it. He looked desperately about him, trying to answer Virgil. At last, frantic, he promised idiotically, as if the notion had just flashed on him from the skies, "I'll get a job!"

The laughter started almost instantly among them—it waited only for the shock of his words to ebb—and mounted uncontrollably. Had they been females, it would certainly have pushed them to hysterics. Even McNaughton finally lay in the grass, powerless.

Robb was the first to leave off, embarrassed. "Sorry, Collin. We're sorry, really." To the others, sternly: "O.K. Enough is plenty."

Johnny, kindly: "It just struck me so funny, Collin. Because ever since I first met you, what you've been tryin' to do is: Get a job!"

White-faced, Terrence answered coldly, "I mean I'll go into the C.C.C. They'll take me. They've got to take anybody."

Virgil and McNaughton were completely serious by now. McNaughton, after studying Robb's angry face, turned to Virgil—the old habit of respect erasing the new discovery—and inquired of him, speaking slowly, "God's blood, Benthwick, why not admit it, after all?"

And Robb pleaded, "Yes, why not? Because we know sooner or later it will have to come to that, otherwise. D'you think the stench of that would be so much better, Benthwick?"

His tone described a future Terrence for them: taking orders with the slum boys, felling trees, digging ditches, standing in line for the food of government charity, mocked at for painting and for being delicate, at last hiding his kit, burying it in the woods, finally swagging cheap and crude, the little man lost. Or else he was to have some other pitiful destroying job—endlessly stenciling the spines of books in a library, humiliated or embarrassed or corrupted by the Mrs. McNaughtons, and paid his weekly dole in script.

Silently, they admitted their own incompetence to deal with the situation, as well as Terrence's incompetence to deal with any situation. "The glorious uncompromising incompetence of a Cézanne, or a Van Gogh," McNaughton muttered it for them. "The lunatic's genius helplessness. The genius's brilliant, noble, unsullied helplessness."

Terrence stared at him questioningly, more than ready to be hurt.

"But by God, you'd better really *be* a genius, though," Virgil threatened him.

Terrence was about to shrill at them all that they could go to hell, he was tired of them treating him the way they did all the time, and so on; but Robb, conciliatory, stopped him at the last possible moment: "They mean you're noncommercial, Terry, and had better stay that way"; and the *Terry*, which he'd never used before, surprised him, burned him, though apparently no one else had heard it. He addressed McNaughton in a different tone: "It's settled, then? And not to be held against him, ever? McNaughton, Benthwick? You too, Rue?"

McNaughton nodded slowly, defeated; closed his eyes. It seemed to him that Robb had used some word or tone that was wrong, false, or at any rate strange. He thought he'd heard it plainly, yet he couldn't remember it now, just a moment later. He shrugged away his own confusion, because the thing that occurred to him, and then occurred again, was not quite conceivable.

Then gone suddenly haggard, he rose and made the sign of benediction over Terrence: "Ye shall dine with the Philistines. Go. And dine with the Philistines. And in the days of your greatness ye will remember us and buy us wine."

2

august

they
would
touch
truth

search for reality

During that first, humiliating, and final illness of his life, Mr. Morley always kept a book or two of Thomas Wolfe's by his bedside, though he was seldom patient enough to take much of such ranting at a time. He kept Wolfe there, as, lacking the proper portrait, he might have kept some discolored photograph of a dead loved face.

The face of course was the face of his son: he saw enough of George in Wolfe's shouting, unbalanced heroes to be reminded of his boy, the crazy idealism of the boy, and the unyoked energy of him. He stayed with the books sometimes as long as an hour at a stretch, subduing his irritation at all their drunken wordiness and childish chest-thumping.

His doctor, formerly but no longer a friend, commented, "I didn't know you read novels," and Mr. Morley answered shortly, "I don't. These aren't." They were a thunderous pleading for recognition, they were an endless crying for some impossible salvation. He thought them of much the same kidney as what George might have painted, had he lived.

And he had died; Mr. Morley knew it.

He knew it because he saw it often: sometimes he woke to see it at two or three o'clock in the morning; sometimes an immeasurably fast, sharp-bayoneted moment would bring it while he was dressing for dinner, combing his hair. He contrived several versions of the way it happened. He'd had plenty of time, two years; because he felt it

was going to happen as soon as he heard that George had left for Spain.

He often told himself, bitter as gall, how great a thing it was for a man to know that his only son had died while fighting in Spain, a country as foreign as Asia, fighting for something never in this world to be attained, the preposterous ideals of Communism, Liberalism. He insisted often, in a silent hell, that it was fine to have begot such a son: a valiant ass, strutting defiance—but at last down with the tears and gasping all the same, because that was the only way of dying. Such a fine valiant ass—dying perhaps not even on the battlefield but in some stinking little infirmary, dying of the dirt in his wounds, or dying of some filth taken into his hungry guts. He often told himself it was a great thing for a man to know.

"He isn't dead, Mr. Morley," Terrence told him. "You've no right to do that to yourself, sir."

Before his illness, he'd been too strong to answer. After sickness got him locked inside the big coffin, his bedroom, he couldn't help it: the words just came out. "Why doesn't he come back then?"

"He will. He *will* come back, sir. He's as stubborn as you are, if I may say so. He'll come back in his own time."

And for a couple of months, the April and May after the fighting was over in Spain, Mr. Morley had hoped again—enough so that his bedside telephone became an instrument of agony for him, but enough, too, for the sun to seem a friend again and for water to taste sweet. During June, Terrence had pretended to be exasperated with him: "Good heavens, sir, do you expect him to *fly*? He's probably working his way over on some freighter. I don't look for him till Christmas, I really don't."

In July, when he'd found out accidentally that Terrence was advertising among the Spanish refugees in France, and advertising all over the United States as well, he'd nearly choked with rage: "*Stop! Stop immediately; and if you ever try such a thing again, I'll kill you!*"

Terrence had winced and bitten his lip. He was always running into this quality, this fierce pride that was like some raging bull. He had none of it at all in himself; it frightened him. At such moments he remembered his father's moods, and vanished almost as quickly as he used to.

But Morley could never be cross with him for long: they were

father and son by choice. A day later: "You meant well. We'll not mention it again. God damn! Can it be time for another pill? Don't you ever think of anything else? What've you got, anyway? Some kind of built-in alarm clock?" Six pills a day, for a man who'd scorned aspirin.

And now, in August, the stage at which George must not be mentioned. The conviction, positive now, that he was dead. And Terrence could see Mr. Morley beginning to die with it.

At night he knelt and prayed, feeling foolish.

"God. Lord. Please. Don't—let—him—die. Don't—let—Mr. Morley—die." He spaced his words carefully, trying to get the message through clearly. "This is—wrong. For Mr. Morley to die—without seeing—his—son. And if he can see his—son, he won't—die. Please, God, don't let him—die. I—*beg* you, God!"

He tried to think of some offering to make; but he had tried bribery here before, in childhood, and it hadn't worked. Besides, he had nothing, just his painting; and his painting was his own life.

He remembered Botticelli's sacrifice of his painting to the Lord; and shuddered. The man was mad. There was no God.

He rose.

All the same, he found less time for work now than ever before in his life. He tirelessly explored the world for things to keep Mr. Morley amused, or interested, or even healthily angry. He brought people into the sickroom he'd been forbidden to bring there, McNaughton for one. He learned the feminine form of lie: a trick of exaggerating tiny incidents into stories, of finding the absurd in everything and "touching it up." He tried to teach Mr. Morley to draw. He pretended to worship Roosevelt, just often enough for the flames of anger to burn high each time. He let Mr. Morley give him the equivalent of a college course in stocks, bonds, investments of other sorts; and he learned flatteringly well.

Mr. Morley: "You poor fool. You're the one who looks pale. Look at yourself in the mirror, there. Ghastly. I want you to get out in the sun more."

"Fine. Let's go to the sun porch," taking the heavy weight of the sick man onto his own straining arm.

But that was only later. At the beginning of the illness, when it was still diagnosed as a peptic ulcer, George Morley II had kept his giant's pride intact and would have fallen before he'd use a helping

arm; later, in the spring of '39, during the time of hopefulness about his son, he took the arm, grumbled at its frailness. Now in the summer, with the resection operation past, with the pain and vomiting and difficulty in breathing all become old acquaintances, with the word *cancer* finally torn from a staff of helpless doctors, Morley permitted Terrence to wheel his chair to the sun porch and permitted himself to sit there hour after hour in deadly lassitude.

Lassitude punctuated by pain so marvelously fierce it sometimes left him gasping, as if in rapture.

Once, gone cruel with pain, Mr. Morley had taunted harshly: "If you think you're going to be remembered in my will for all this sweetness and light, Terrence, you'd better come to grips with reality and stop wasting your time. I mean it: I'm warning you. You can expect about one thousand dollars, and that's that."

Terrence's face had crumpled like a smashed doll's. His lips had grown so stiff from the hurt he could scarcely move them. At last he'd said very quietly, "I hope I never live to hear your will, Mr. Morley."

Morley had almost cried, apologizing. Terrence had worn the dignity he had rarely. . . .

Now in August he wept to Robb, "He's dying! I can see him dying! They told me it's spreading all over his damn' stomach! He's down from two-twenty to a hundred and fifty, and lately I can't even get him to eat *anything*! Oh God, Robb, did you know, now he even has a lump on the abdomen so big you can see it through his pajamas, you can really *see* it! Where is George, where in God's name can he *be*? Is he dead, do you suppose?"

"Take it easy, Terrence; take it easy. The only thing I can think of would be to try those Commie friends of his again. They'd know, if anybody would."

"Oh! Oh *no*!" Terrence cried involuntarily. When he'd tried them before, it was only to be insulted. He protested: "They aren't reasonable, Robb. Really, they're the most irrational people I've ever known!"

Gently, Robb offered to go with him this time.

They'd always been terrifying to Terrence, those Commie friends of George's. Humiliating, unanswerable, terrifying to him.

They'd thought he was nothing, nobody, and had made it clear; yet, by the fall of his junior year, the season he met them, Terrence had known he *was* someone, something, really not often repeated.

By that time his body and feet had grown used to comfortable clothes; he couldn't remember at all how it felt not to luxuriate in a bathtub daily; and his nerves—with no one to call him a sissy or to trip him on stairs or to tell him to join the C.C.C.—had become smooth as a pond.

Mr. Morley had telephoned Mrs. Galmayer by then and had told her he considered her influence vitiating.

Mr. Morley had introduced him to friends as his "second son."

The head of the Art Department had confessed he'd never had a Terrence Collin to teach before, never!

An impatient model had threatened, pretty convincingly, to scream out an alarm of rape unless he stopped painting immediately and made love to her. Obliging, he'd been surprised by his own vigor and finesse.

Robb, slightly drunk and very miserable, had told him the most astonishing thing he'd ever heard. And had added, "I know it's altogether insane and—of course I'm not asking for anything, Terry. But for some reason I thought I'd go to pieces entirely, wind up killing myself or explode like a firecracker, if I couldn't at least—have you know about it. I mean if you're going to despise me for it, it seemed to me you should at least be *able* to choose to despise me for it." And had been from that time on most humbly grateful, indeed a slave for life, no pay required, for Terrence's response, despite its being only a lack of revulsion.

Terrence knew he was someone, all right, by the time he met those Communists.

But they'd been crazy people, men and women and boys and girls, all crazy; George finally as much as the rest.

"You're incredible," George used to upbraid him; "incredible! I wouldn't have thought it possible for anyone to be so—so—well, 'self-centered' isn't the word, because you don't think you're just the center, you think you're the whole show! You're like a shut-in. You don't know and you don't care what's going on in the world around you. I can drive you less than one hundred miles from here and show

you teen-age kids the size of ten-year-olds. A whole *batch* of them! I can show you their stools—if it wouldn't turn your delicate little stomach—and the stools will tell you, roughly, what they've had to eat for the last week or so because it'll always be only one thing: it'll be whatever kind of crop they've been picking, peaches or strawberries or whatever! Yeah! What do you think of *that*?"

"I—I think that's terrible."

"I think that's terrible, simply *terrible*," George had mimicked him. "Christ! And I can take you out to where whole families are living in about two dozen cardboard boxes pieced together with bits of stolen wire! That's their home! About three miles from a cemetery and mausoleum where it costs more to bury and keep a God damned *corpse* than it would to feed a living person! Yeah! You think that's terrible, too? Huh?"

"Oh, come on, George. I'm not doing it to 'em."

"I beg your pardon: that's where you're wrong! Every day you permit social injustice to continue without protest you're as much an oppressor as—"

"God, you never used to talk like that: 'oppressor!' You sound like somebody on a soapbox."

George's tone had immediately changed, his manner softened to one of persuasion. "But you do agree, don't you, that if you see something wrong going on, a strong man trampling on a weak man's face, and don't try to do anything about it, you're tacitly saying it's all right? Collin?"

"Well, O.K., but— Gee, what am I supposed to do about it? You want me to go dig up corpses and take the gold out of their teeth for 'em or something?"

"If you're part of a society that's exploiting its workers, drugging them, lulling them with the dope of traditions and inhibitions and jazz and moving picture shows, you've got to, if you respect yourself at *all*, fight it, *fight* it! Shake yourself out of the dope and wake up! You're a worker, too, Collin! It's your own class that's being sucked into slavery!"

George had taken him to the transients' little cities, to vagrants' colonies, to the soup-kitchens of charity. Later, to lectures and to meetings.

In an effort to be helpful, and also because he was fascinated,

Terrence had made sketches—perhaps a hundred sketches: the sores, the feet bound with heavy cloth and scraps of leather, the crafty humbleness of starvation faces.

A small dark man with bulging eyes and dead-looking skin had taken the sketches—from George's hands—and had said a friend of his was doing a book and might be able to use them. There'd been no suggestion of payment, nor had he bothered with thanks. Instead, he'd merely recommended the Bowery scenes of Reginald Marsh for Terrence's study, adding, "You've got a lot to learn, kid. Right now your stuff shows about as much social consciousness as a hole in the ground."

When, later, Terrence had choked out a complaint to George, he'd been answered: "I know it, Collin. I thought that was pretty highhanded too. But that guy's a Party member, see? And they're like that. He just took it for granted you were better indoctrinated than you are."

"Better indoctrinated? Better indoctrinated? Talk about exploitation!"

"The trouble with you is you're so naïve. You see, 'the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all,' sure, but not the each before the all. You get it?"

Although Mr. Morley's friends used to say that all pinkos should be smoked out, lined up against a wall, and shot, Mr. Morley always said no, they were healthful for democracy and, besides, far too amusing to be destroyed. For once, Terrence disobeyed him: aching for his sketches like a spinster after love, he'd imagined machine-gunning cell after cell—though all he'd said to George was "Oh. . . ."

And not only had the crazy Communists been uncivil toward his work, but toward himself, personally, as well. Terrence had bought, from Virgil Benthwick's own department, a double-breasted blue serge suit, the first brand-new suit he'd ever had, and he'd loved it so much that just thinking about it could bring a lump to his throat. He'd carefully learned how to fold a handkerchief for its pocket. When the Communists had complimented him on his appearance, their mockery was lost on him and he'd answered shyly, shining with modesty, "I didn't realize the lapels were quite so sharp when I bought it." And from that time on, he'd been known as the kid who

hadn't realized the lapels were quite so sharp when he bought it. He'd blushed every time it was brought up; he'd taken to kicking them in the face before shooting them.

When they baited Terrence, George had merely scowled. Occasionally he'd muttered, "Oh, let's not run it into the ground."

But if he refused to join the attack, he'd also refused to let Terrence remain at home. "It's *your* class. The whole idea of it is for you people."

Class warfare, class antagonism, wage slaves and surplus value. Contradictions of capitalism (hunger and waste; living in free union frowned upon, but prostitution permitted). Evidences of capitalism's approaching demise (the depression, the Dust Bowl, John Dillinger). Terrence hadn't known, he simply hadn't guessed, that it was all so bad. And these were the people to set it right, with their pamphlets and their speeches and their strikes, and at length their revolution. Perhaps so. He wouldn't argue. Yet they'd made him almost ill with terror when they looked at him with mocking eyes, bold scornful eyes: because *he* was somehow the archaristocrat, the parasite, the weakling whom they'd guillotine immediately, granted the power; and in his heart he'd confessed it. And he'd even thought them justified.

Once George had made him walk a picket line, up and down, up and down, hour after hour, carrying a huge placard that proclaimed: *Northby's Shoe Store is unfair to its employees!*

Professional strike-breakers had arrived and tried to heckle him. These he'd seen as his father—in one way inexplicably, because his father had despised strike-breakers—and, quite to his surprise, he'd found the courage to stand up to them, or at least to give as good as he got in insults. His replies were so different from what they'd expected—because he never could learn the proper jargon—and his manner so odd, semifanatic, that he more or less won the day. No one had known quite what to make of him, neither his own side nor the other. The Union hadn't wanted an incident that day, and the Party agitators hadn't either; yet when they saw Terrence almost demanding to be hit over the head or at least shoved around, they'd have been fools not to realize the pictorial possibilities. But if two or three bully-boys had come close to it, no one had actually hit him: For most men, hitting Terrence wasn't the easiest thing in the world

to do: nor was Marie Antoinette beheaded by the first executioner to whom the job was assigned.

His fiercest threat came from George. George's demand that Mr. Morley be kept from knowing about his increasingly close affiliation with the Party had been made at the first of Terrence's stay; it was the sole payment George asked. Terrence had been eager to acquiesce, but after a while he found it simply suffocating to be deceitful to Mr. Morley in any way. "It's not honest. It isn't fair—for you, maybe, I don't know and I'm not saying about that, criticizing you or anything. But it isn't right that *I* should stay in his house and eat his food and everything and—"

Ominously: "And what?"

"And, well, *deceive* him."

"You turn stoolie, Collin, and I'll grind you into powder."

"I— I didn't mean *I* would ever tell him, George. I'm not like *that*! But I mean, why don't you? You know, it doesn't seem the way you usually do things. You've never been afraid to say anything to anybody. You know what I mean."

"Listen: I've been—advised, or requested, or whatever you want to call it, to keep my mouth shut to certain people about certain things. That's discipline. There are reasons for rules like that. To stay put and shut up. I hate sneaking like I hate whipped cream on sauerkraut. But it isn't important how *I* usually operate. What's important is that there are reasons for orders, and discipline is the heart of any organization. Now don't you forget it, Collin: you turn stoolie, and I'll—"

Even now, in the summer of '39, when George had been gone so long, Terrence remembered that whole period with a stab of panic: because those Communists had indeed seemed mad to him, truly insane. Not only had they despised what any sensible person would want, the things money could buy, but they'd even scorned passions such as his own, the love of painting for the sake of painting. They lived, including most of those who had money, in an astonishing lack of material comfort, and yet the main point to bother them seemed to be that some non-Communists possessed material comforts while other non-Communists did not. They were invariably insulting toward any effort that didn't in some way benefit the downtrodden, and yet many of the things they approved of—at least many of the

novels and the paintings and the plays—had made the entire world seem an unendurable place, for the downtrodden as well as for everyone else.

"But it is unendurable!" George used to answer these complaints. "It'll go on being unendurable, too—until it's changed. That's the whole point." And had always elaborated, selecting one injustice or another: "So long as the black-list system is operative, every worker who cares whether or not his kids go hungry is a slave. In point of fact, really, a *slave*! Nobody can deny it. And I guess you'll admit slavery is unendurable? Collin?"

"Sure. Sure, I'll admit that—but, George, honest to *Pete*!, some of the things they *do*!"

"Like what?"

"Well, like the other night. At Laski's. That woman and that man. Using the bedroom like that. And yelling out they weren't quite through, and to hold things up a couple of minutes! I mean, my *God*!"

"That's trivial. Of course what's behind it isn't trivial at all: all those bourgeois inhibitions you have—and so many people have, I'm not blaming you particularly—are just the result of the churches' and the governments' grinding people down so long, making them ashamed of themselves so they'd be easier to control. That's all that is. Whenever you're shocked, it just shows you haven't broken out of your intellectual bondage yet, that's all."

"Oh."

He could not win; it had been a nightmare. He'd hid in his painting. But they used to get to him, even there. "It doesn't signify anything!" they'd scoffed. "Your work doesn't signify anything. You create in a vacuum, kid."

He'd found that the only safe place was near Mr. Morley.

More and more often, he'd been introduced by Mr. Morley as his "second son."

He'd grown so happy to be that, or, rather, he'd continued to feel so happy and safe just to be near the wonderful kind giant, month after month, that he'd almost fallen into the pit of desiring nothing more.

But had been saved from that by an inexcusable, undeniable wish: to be the only son, or at least the favorite son.

And Mr. Morley, wanting George back so excruciatingly, yet with

such pride—because of course he knew George was gone a year or so before he actually left—had played with the inexcusable wish, fed it, and let it shine for his own solace.

“It’s nice of you to say you’ll go with me, but I don’t even know where they *are* any more, honestly I don’t, Robb.”

“Rue might know.”

“Rue? Do you think he would?” He imagined himself finding them, through Johnny, and then being told about his vacuum again, hearing about the sharp lapels again. Imagined being asked where he was staying now, what he was doing, and knowing they knew because they always knew everything, and seeing their expressions, the implications of their smiles. Imagined someone’s pretending not to remember him at all. Why would they, even if he found them, tell him anything about George? “I—don’t know,” he mumbled.

“It’s worth a chance. As I remember, Johnny was pretty well mixed up with the comrades there for a while. And George was practically living at his place.”

“I haven’t even *seen* Rue in, oh, about a year.”

“Well, go see him. He’s the only person I can think of who might be able to give you a lead. To them, I mean. Not to George. I know he doesn’t know where George is: we talked about that when we had dinner.”

“Oh, you had dinner with him?”

Robb nodded. “A month or so ago I told you. I even invited you. You don’t remember anything any more.”

“I’ve been so—worried.”

“You better watch it, kid. Really. Take it easy.”

“I’ve even begun biting my fingernails again. I can’t help it.”

“Sure you can help it. Don’t be a nincompoop.”

Terrence looked down sullenly. After all, *he* had never told Robb, “Sure you can help it. Don’t be a nincompoop.” But he asked for Johnny’s address.

The next day he turned away from a shabby door and faced a shabby street and muttered to himself the two most desolate-sounding words he’d ever heard: “*Zu spät! Zu spät!*” In Negro districts,

though perhaps in Negro districts only, such brazen McNaughton imitations went smoothly for him, comfortably.

He was indeed too late. The Rues had gone, a curious neighbor told him, on vacation.

"Vacations s'posed to be to rest you up so you can work some more," Gladys observed companionably, lazily, lying on her back, shaded by a willow tree, "but—" And then she stopped. She had been about to say, "I think they're the thing you *do* the whole damn' work to *get*!" and changed her mind because she saw she might be starting the ancient argument again: that she should quit the job he thought so horrible, and he should go to work instead—at the new hydraulic parts factory in Emeryville, or at the Westinghouse motor repair plant still nearer home, or else back at that bowling alley (those poor fools never *had* stopped calling), or even at his uncle's San Francisco elevators. She looked across at him, hoping he hadn't listened for once. But apparently he had. •

Drowsily: "Yeah?"

"But *I* think," and since she couldn't find anything she ought to think, she sat upright enough to tickle his bare foot, "but I think—"

Johnny giggled. "Go on. What do you think?"

"I think they're really *mainly* to catch up on foot-ticklin'."

He giggled again; withdrew his foot. "That's not what you were going to say, though: that's silly. What was it? What'd you change your mind from?"

"Nothing. I didn't change my mind. That's what I was goin' to say."

"No, it's not. I can tell by the way you said it."

She pretended indignation. "Two years of livin' in sin and two in matrimony give you the right to tell me what I was goin' to say? After I *said* what I was goin' to say?"

"Didn't live in sin any two years. We lived in sin three years."

"Why, Johnny Rue! We absolutely did not! You wouldn't even move in with me for about the whole first year."

"Well, the year I didn't move in. What d'you call that?"

"*That* wasn't livin' in sin! That was just—jus'—"

"Yeah? Jus' what?"

"Johnny, they don't call it living in sin, if you're just—occasionally—"

"Whenever you get the chance? They sure do."

"Oh, they do not!" She plucked a stem of foxtail and began chewing it.

He watched in fascination. "Well, anyway, I can't remember what we were talking about before, but I know I was right."

"I wouldn't doubt it for a second." And before he could become suspicious, she leaned across and kissed him tenderly—tasting so interesting that her kiss was twice returned. "You us'ally are," she mumbled gratefully.

He lay back and closed his eyes, feeling perfectly contented.

Or almost perfectly contented: because invariably there was the tiniest shadow of pain in remembering their first years, and months, and hours, even their first quarrels—they wouldn't come again, not one of those moments could ever come again, and they'd been made of a happiness so rich as to astonish him. "Why doesn't anybody ever say how it is?" he'd asked her, time after time. "They're always bleating around about June and moon, and saying to Stay As Sweet As You Are, and If There Is Someone Lovelier Than You, and all that crap, but nobody ever—not in anything I ever heard or read—ever said how it really is."

"Maybe—" Shyly: "Could you ever say it, in paintin'?"

"I think it'd have to be in words, Gladys. Or at least it'd have to be something that moves along, so you can't hold it and look at it. Sometimes long-hair music starts to, or at least seems to start to, and then as soon as you think, 'Now he's going to get it!' it just turns stupid and heavy. In art, about the only thing I can think of would be Nefertiti—she was this Queen of Egypt, real young— You've got the same kind of necks, you and her— Or, Glad, take the Venus de Milo; you can see, can't you, how sculpture would stand a heck of a lot better chance? Because nobody can hold it or make it stand still? Because *any* sculpture has, I don't care how lousy it is, eight-ten faces!"

"Yeah? How d'you mean exactly?"

- "I mean you go walk all the hell around a piece of sculpture! It would have a *much* better chance, I'd say. Yet, after all, some of

Romney's Lady Hamiltons, maybe— No, I take that back: Romney's feeling is just flirty, compared to Venus and Nefertiti." Exasperated: "I've never seen 'em! I'm just guessing! In fact, I don't even know how to say real well how I *mean* nobody's said it yet! But by God, I'd think *some* of those smart boys would've figured it out by now!"

The way to say it: the way to estimate the wealth of love, or formulate the mixture of its color. He'd felt disloyal to her, unworthy, that he couldn't express it, and it didn't excuse him that his masters too had always failed. "Look: like I think I can say it sometimes! Like even just the sound would say it. *Gladys*, and *Gladys*, and *Gladys*, and then I remember: I used to hate that name!"

But Gladys had never really cared about the smart boys, and what they'd dared or hadn't: she'd been just hotly, frankly jealous of their love, hers and Johnny's. No one could have its peer. White people especially not, disgusting as they must be in their sickly-looking, unfinished-looking nakedness. She used to dig her nails into him, to get him back with her alone, when he'd talk about such things, in those first years.

They'd made up a code word for *I love you* then, in the days before the legalizing ceremony, and she used it now. "Yoli, Johnny, yoli."

He recommended sleepily, "You better, woman. You'd better keep that up, unless you'd especially like to be found, one piece at a time, floating down the San Francisco Bay."

She laughed softly. "You're the funniest guy. That's always in your mind, isn't it, that I might—change. But how could you be any surer?"

He reached over and encircled her wrist firmly with his fingers. "Change all you want. Not going to get away, anyway."

"Lifetime sentence, huh?"

"Yep."

"Nothing off for good behavior?"

"Nope. What would good behavior have to do with *you*, anyway?"

Again she laughed; stroked his arm. Then quickly she dropped the foxtail stem into his ear, at the same instant beginning to tickle his foot once more, so deftly this time he couldn't keep from giggling and had to release her.

"Outwitted again. Sleepy ol' sheriff got outwitted again, I see." And when he tried tickling her, even with the help of the foxtail stem,

she foiled him again: she was too relaxed to be ticklish. "Give up, man. Take a nap."

"That's all I was trying to do in the first place. My mistake was to let a hussy female woman of the restless sex onto the scene."

"Women too restless for you, boy? How d'you explain that? Can't you figure out *any* way to quiet 'em down?"

"Glad!"

"What? I didn't say anything, just a civil question." When she saw him close his eyes for another try at dozing off, she attacked again: "How come you're not workin' anyway, boy? How come you're not paintin' and swearin' and fussin' around, the way you always do? H'm?"

Drowsiness finally routed, he sat upright and answered grandly, choosing his words like a bishop, "Because I happen to be on vacation, Mrs. Ruc. I'm—recuperating from the turmoil of creation. I'm revitalizing my—artistic drive."

Slowly: "Well, I'll be damned! That what you doin', no kidding? All that? An' here I thought you were just tryin' to see if you could breathe through your nose!"

But he'd been taunted enough: he pulled her to him fiercely and kissed her into temporary respect. "By God, I'll teach *you* how to behave!" And so he did, with her permission.

This was the first vacation of their lives, a six-day trip to Palm Springs (they were at the moment in the Indian Reservation nearby), made in the first car of their lives, a rattling warrior of a tenth-hand car financed by the first sales of their lives—a sweater Gladys had knitted for a rest-room patron, and two pictures Johnny had painted, bought by an eccentric beggar. Johnny's sales had been made weeks after he'd despaired of ever selling anything, and had smashed a window with his bare knuckles and had ground a tube of Prussian blue into the kitchen linoleum with the heel of his shoe. The beggar had watched him paint Gladys day after day (it being her month for the night shift) in her thin, pale yellow summer dress; he'd finally followed them home from the park, mumbling, threatening an invisible opponent. They were afraid of him—white and mad, and offering to buy the painting after they'd watched him beg so long—and would not let him in; indeed, urged him, through the locked screen door, to go home. Through the screen, furtive as Judas,

he'd shown a wad of bills. When he left, it was with Gladys in the light yellow dress, and with a clown, darkly beseeching from some far point of agony; and Johnny's hand held five germ-rich ten-dollar bills. They'd danced around together hysterically then, and rejoiced, and shouted, and celebrated, and finally had made love very well. But Johnny awoke in the night feeling such grief he thought he must be ill, or losing his mind, or poisoned with the rough liquor. It turned out he wanted Gladys in the light yellow summer dress back again; he was longing for her as desperately as if it were Gladys herself who'd left him. He wanted the clown back as if the clown had been his own breathing child. For hours he lay alone, Gladys having gone to work, and called himself the craziest fool on earth; but the pain stayed on, deaf.

"You still think I'm nuts, for that, Glad?" he asked now. "For caring so much after that guy bought our pictures?"

Remembering how he'd acted, she started to laugh; but cut it off at a chuckle. "At first, I sure did. But finally I got to see it. A little. I kept thinking, 'Do I let myself act like that? And I'll never see my sweater again!' And see, I mean I liked it—I *really* liked it—just even to *look* at that sweater! But then I saw it wasn't anything like how it is with you. Even if I did more or less make up my own pattern for it, besides."

Annoyed that she could put his painting and her knitting on a common level even momentarily, he maintained a superior silence.

But she didn't hear his silence. A mockingbird called from a branch of the willow tree next to theirs and she imitated him softly.

He began to call more meaningfully; again she imitated. He set out to search for her. She answered him gently, almost coyly.

He grew suddenly eloquent, sang with real force and beauty. When he'd finished, she echoed the last three notes.

He repeated his appeal, emphasizing its urgency.

They watched him fly about, looking for his invisible siren. Johnny whispered, "You're a little devil, Gladys! Lord-God, you're a tease!"

"Let him go home to his wife," she whispered back.

"He hasn't got one, the lucky guy."

"Sure he's got one, the lucky guy. He just thinks he's some hot-pants lady-killer, flirtin' aroun'. This'll teach him a good lesson."

She sent out an even more seductive-sounding whistle. The bird

seemed about to burst with ardor; passionately besought her to lay aside her veil. He flew hungrily from branch to branch, finally left his own willow tree to invade theirs. At last his antics made her slip into a loud giggle. Hearing herself, she clapped a hand over her mouth and stared at Johnny wide-eyed. Johnny softly informed the bird just six feet above them, "She's the one. She's the one's been doin' it. There's no little sweet-patootie-pie around here for you, fellow. Sorry."

The mockingbird stared down at them, completely soundless for at least half-a-dozen seconds. Then a tirade of furious scolding broke from him, harsh gross croaking sounds; and, finished, he flew away, as swift and busy as a breeze.

"I guess he told *you* off," Johnny said.

"He's got no sense of humor."

"You wasted his time. Led him on, and just wasted his time."

"If he's still courtin' in August, I guess I'm not the only one's been wastin' his time for him. He should have a whole family by now, shouldn't he?"

"Good Lord, the poor guy was just *hatched* last spring! Didn't you notice that? Why, sure, he was still shy a couple of feathers here and there; this was going to be his first affair! You may've given him an inferiority complex so bad, the rest of his life, Glad, that worms'll sense his lack of confidence and defy him, instinctively!"

"Baloney!" But there was indecision in her tone: had she really been mean to the mocker?

Her eyes looked so perplexed, almost guilty, that Johnny laughed and rolled over to her. That he'd fooled her and made her momentarily half-ashamed hurt him in some slight, odd way. He loved her even more than he had before.

Later in the afternoon, they drove to Andreas Canyon, admission being only twenty-five cents per car, and went wading in one of the cold sulfur brooks there. They thought the whole place fantastic, a series of wonders. The tricks the canyon had with temperature—teeth-chattering coldness in gullies and shadows, abruptly joined to intense dry heat of sun-scorched areas—were entirely new to them. They'd had no idea air could be so pure or boulders so gigantic. Enormous Indian mortars, more than a century old, fascinated, even awed them. The tiny furred masked faces of raccoons spying on them

from the branches of trees made them giggle like children. And, like children, they couldn't resist carving their initials in one of the great cottonwood trees, "because it's going to live longer than we are." They had almost the entire fifteen miles of the canyon to themselves and Johnny estimated rather bitterly that not one of Palm Springs' bars could have kept from bankruptcy with twice its traffic. But when he saw that his remark discomfited Gladys, he tried to leave the subject with a joke, "Oh well, I guess being kept out of bars has its bright side: at least you won't be coming home with the blind staggers and knocking me around so bad this way."

She answered him with a smile, a trifle wistful: "Never mind, Johnny. I got a secret five in my wallet you don't even know about. When we get up home, I think I'll get us a whole *fifth* of gin!"

"Close your eyes." And when she had, he kissed her eyelids gently. It was a custom between them that indicated complete approval.

They went on exploring the canyon, hand in hand; they left just minutes before five o'clock, the entrance gate's closing time.

And left reluctantly then, because leaving meant returning to their cabin at Hatchett's Court, a place with a single merit: it was the only one that would have them. Palm Springs being so small, they'd found Hatchett's simply by noticing which blocks were less grand, and then which weren't very grand at all, and continuing in this direction. As they'd been told about the Court by a friend who'd been there, they weren't put off by its ugliness and lack of paint while they'd sat looking at it from their car; it was the interior they hadn't been prepared for. On the not more than sixty-five square feet of their cabin floor, five kinds of linoleum had been used. Some of it was green and some was blue and some was red, some was worn and some fairly new. A hole in the wall had been patched with an old window shade. A sign above the dresser told them not to spit on the floor. A sign above the bed told that if the bungalow were used for immoral purposes, the miscreants would be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. Nailed on the inside of the door was a furious warning against bringing liquor into the cabin, while the punishment outlined for selling liquor to the Indians was really formidable. And the mirror was crazy. Feeling far more despised here than they'd felt in passing the places they knew wouldn't have them, they'd made a point of not looking at each other as they unpacked. Finally, Gladys said, "I'm not too crazy about spitting on the floor, anyway, are you?"

And Johnny agreed with a snort that he'd always thought it a pretty boring pastime. They got out of the cabin as quickly as possible, afraid for their vacation.

They'd immediately begun searching for a colored bar; if they could have even one drink in a bar, a great part of the cabin's horror would be nullified.

But the friend who'd told them about Palm Springs hadn't been a drinking man, so it cost them the better part of an hour to learn that all Palm Springs bars were exclusively for whites; nor would any package liquor store sell to Negroes. "Palm Springs ain't supposed to be no vacation place for colored," a Negro grocer told them. "Hatchett's Court just built to be a place for the he'p that work for the whites to *live* at. Palm Springs don't want no colored hangin' 'round to play, no, sir!"

Johnny couldn't tell from the man's tone whether he agreed with the idea or not, so he hurried Gladys out of the store: the one aspect of the race question that could make her literally sick with rage was Negro prejudice against Negroes.

But the next morning, when they'd discovered Andreas Canyon and the Indian Reservation, they felt that those places more than made up for the liquor ban and even came close to atoning for Hatchett's Court itself. Returning to what they called their "mansion," this afternoon, they walked contentedly, arm-in-arm like newly-weds.

What they saw at the entrance was stronger than their mood, however; it irritated them immeasurably. One of the most famous Negro entertainers in the world was climbing out of his limousine, his face set and bitter, while his aides angrily unloaded monogrammed luggage from the trunk compartment.

Johnny burst out passionately: "God damn the bastards every one to hell!" and Gladys pressed his arm, agreeing with him. The fury they felt at the artist's having been refused elsewhere was mountainous. For a moment, hope itself seemed strangled.

Then the rather timid whisper: "Would you care if I asked for his autograph, Johnny?"

"That's too asinine for words," he grumbled, "that's real kid stuff!" Nevertheless he secretly wanted her to, and she heard as much in his tone.

Her request restored the entertainer to his usual high humor. He'd

have been willing to give Gladys far more than his autograph and wasn't too inhibited to tell her so. His smile was dazzling. "I'd love to have you for dinner. I believe I'd start with your ears."

Watching from a distance, Johnny fumed indignantly, proud and jealous.

And once inside their cabin, he started to rail at her for having flirted, even though she hadn't flirted any more than she always flirted: it was automatic with her he knew, meaningless. Still, he fumed.

Unperturbed, if not downright pleased, she laughed him out of annoyance, putting her face close to his, and teasing and chanting the way children spell out their friends' disgrace in the schoolyard: "Johnny's jealous, Johnny Rue is *jealll*-lous!"

The tirade ended by his laughing too. He took her in his arms and lay with her on the bed, kissing her and hugging her close against him. "Why am I jealous of you?" he asked, puzzled, soft. "Why am I always jealous of you?"

She merely nuzzled her cheek against his.

Then very gravely, talking to himself as much as to her: "You know why? I'll tell you why. It's because I never could see, even in the beginning, how you ever got the notion in your head to be in love with me. Why should you? It's crazy. Here I am, a really black guy, not good-looking, absolutely no money, and with only one thing he can do: paint. And nobody likes the way he paints."

"I do. That man did."

"That beggar; he doesn't count. And you don't count either. See, it doesn't make any sense: why should you fall in love with me? You could get somebody like that fresh guy, easily—he practically had a heart attack right there on the street. And instead of getting somebody like that, you went and took me, an'—an' *keep* me like some God damned gigolo!"

"Oh Johnny, shut up."

"I used to think it all the time: why *should* she love me? Now I just think it once in a while."

"You feelin' sorry for yourself?"

"Hell no, I'm not feeling sorry for myself. Not at all. But what I'm trying to say is: that's why I'm jealous, sometimes. And why *shouldn't* I be?"

"Why *should* you be? Because I do love you."

"Yeah. But what I mean is, how come you love me better than anybody else? There is no reason: So why shouldn't I get jealous?"

"You know something? You're goofy."

He stroked her long soft hair—"white woman's hair," his mother enviously called it; and he petted her long slender neck—"a real nigger neck," his mother so hatefully called it. "O.K., maybe I am. Goofy as a goof. But Christ-God, I love you! You know it?"

She nodded, placing her lips to be kissed.

"The you then, when we were kids, Glad. And the you now. More, now. And the you that's coming. Like your skin: I loved your skin, it was so beautiful. And I love it more now, though maybe it's not quite so beautiful as it was. I don't know: I've painted it so much, it's like I see it with its own eyes. Anyway, it's more *you*, see? You're more *you* now; more real, or something. At least, to me it's like that—" Sighing: "So maybe I *am* nuts? Huh?"

She sat up straight and looked down at him seriously and spoke firmly. "Johnny Rue, you listen to me: I'm commissionin' a paintin' from you. Remember that cactus we saw this morning in the canyon? That real *startlin'* golden cactus we saw coming from solid rock?"

"Honey, it couldn't have been coming from solid rock. There must have been some dirt in there, in a crevice or something."

"Never mind, you know the one I mean? We talked about it."

"Sure, I know the one you mean."

"Well, I want a painting of it. Just the way it was, in the early morning light. And I want it coming from *solid* rock. It looked like solid rock to me, and that's the way I want it. An' I want it matted on burlap."

He eyed her, suspiciously. He felt pretty sure she had some foolish symbolist connotation in mind. As he'd long ago convinced himself that he'd educated her past symbolism—his angriest hate in the entire field of art—he felt irritated at her regression. His lips parted, to start a lecture.

But the touch of her long slender fingers commanded them to silence. "Please, Johnny. I want it."

Nodding, he kissed her fingers, wrist, arm. For the first time it occurred to him that perhaps a kiss was in itself a symbol, and Gladys' face another symbol; her wanting the cactus painting would then be

still another symbol. No shred of the cactus was less a symbol than his entire body, and his body had no more reality than the cactus. But if he were able to *create* her cactus for her, truly, capture her memory of a symbol that was in itself a part of reality, was he not after all approaching the creation of reality? He held her close, their hearts beating together, and felt surprised by his own thoughts. He remembered, precisely, how the cactus had looked in the morning light: golden and strong and fierce, emergent over every opposition. Whatever, exactly, it represented to her, he'd never ask and would very likely never know. But whatever it was, he saw instantly that he was involved in it, was some part of it.

And just as certainly and immediately, he saw why she loved him. His heart began laughing and then he laughed aloud, his arms crushing her and his whole body trembling with excitement.

The little lavender cacti arranged with such restraint on top the reference desk in the San Francisco Public Library made Virgil Benthwick smile: somehow they were, in their dainty fluted turquoise jars, too pretty, too careful, too feminine for words. They were to cacti what toy Chihuahuas were to dogs; exposure either to rain or sun might very probably cause death.

"Good afternoon," he greeted the librarian politely. "Is Mr. McNaughton in?"

"Mr. McNau-ughton? Oh dear, I'm so afraid: not today."

Then Virgil looked at her. A woman in her early thirties. She was smiling at him from behind glasses with rather implausible intentness: a set of muscles about her mouth seemed to have gone on the instant mad—with a twitch, and a twitch, and again a twitch. It was she who had done the cacti, he knew it: she'd selected them, potted them, arranged them. Because she liked things dainty and light and not very real—the scent of her cologne told him so.

He bowed himself away.

She wasn't about to excuse him, however. "Is there anything I can do?" she asked, far too obligingly. "My assistant, Mr. McNaughton, is ill today, but perhaps I can help you?" Something about her inflection on the pronoun "I" made him sensible that enormous re-

sources of power and intelligence and understanding had been placed at his command.

"Thank you, no."

"Don't be too sure, now," she teased, incredibly coy. "Mr. McNaughton and I discuss many of our patrons' problems with each other! I'd be only too glad to *try* to help." She made the vowel in "try" especially long. It said that when she tried, she helped.

Virgil smiled at her coldly. "So kind. But I've no problem. Mr. McNaughton is a friend of mine. I haven't seen him for years, so I thought I'd pop in and say hello."

"Oh, a friend! In that case, you *must* let me have your name! I'd so like to give him the message you were here!"

He noticed that the excitement of talking to him had by now ignited another muscle: her left eye began making all sorts of winks, some tiny, a few prolonged. "Really, it isn't at all neces—"

"I'll give you *mine*, then," she seemed to yearn toward him, almost tenderly. "Because I, too, am a friend of Mr. McNaughton's! I've the *greatest* respect for him! My name is—Miss Leckner."

Virgil stared at her appalled, intuitively on guard: what ruthlessness must lie beneath all that sugar! "Benthwick," he pronounced firmly, as if to make it clear thumbscrews would get no more from him, "Virgil Benthwick."

"Oh! *Oh!*" Miss Leckner rose, nearly overcome with the wonder of the moment. She extended a small grasping hand to him. "Mr. Benthwick!"

Virgil told himself he'd never felt a more predatory touch. Then he noticed why it was she'd troubled to stand. The creature was possessed of a fantastic bosom, a truly extraordinary bosom; and a negligible waist. A moment or two after she must have said it, he heard: "So you're back from New York on your vacation! How thrilling! After two whole years, I believe?"

"Approximately." But did McNaughton actually *speak* to this monstrous phenomenon of frustration? Talk, converse with it? Really trouble himself to wedge words into all this quivering genteel coyness? "I'm only just back yesterday."

She smiled at him more intimately than ever. "Mr. McNaughton—" he suspected her of trying to speak reverently, "Marion, to us—has told me so much about you! And such splendid things! What

inspiration your friendship must have meant to him, in the formative years, in high school, in college! I often think: how very very like Tennyson's friendship for Hallam!"

"You're too flattering," he put her down coldly.

"No; I've often thought it!"

"Oh? But truly, didn't you find 'In Memoriam' rather frightful? I confess I did! Saccharine! Besides, it always struck me as the most inadequately disguised sort of homosexual outpouring!" Enjoying her angry flush, he added with his most deferential smile: "D'you think me quite wrong? In any case, I'm afraid I'd not consider it half worth breaking a blood vessel in Vienna for, to inspire another one of those!"

This time when he bowed she let him go. He made a point of looking her straight in the eye and of not being distracted again by that magnificent inappropriate bosom.

"'Marion to us,' indeed!" he protested silently, finding the street. "'Marion!' From the most horrifyingly authentic harpie I've ever seen!"

He hurried to telephone McNaughton, to make an appointment for dinner as soon as possible. And tried to push the thought from his mind that she'd named McNaughton her assistant. Such a thing could not possibly have happened to their lives.

When, their six day vacation gone, they returned home from Palm Springs and saw George Morley sprawled, sleeping across their front stoop, Gladys and Johnny both felt the sight to be impossible. Life could not have done to him whatever it had done. Nor to them, to find him so.

He looked dirty—deeply, thoroughly dirty as though the dirt were well accustomed to him. He looked old, not twenty-five, but thirty-five or forty; tough with age. He looked like a tramp.

Gladys said nothing. Her breathing became labored; the sight of this thin tough wreck of George was enough to throw her into excitement and confusion, as the old George had always done when first she'd known him. Looking at his beard-stubbed face, pillowed against the cement stoop only by a newspaper, she saw that he'd

been hungry often, probably almost starving many times; and for some reason she felt guilty.

Johnny fell quickly to his knees and touched George lovingly, but hesitantly, as if still unable to believe he really saw him there.

But George came awake snarling and ferociously self-protective, doubling his fists.

Gladys immediately got her house key out and opened the door and urged them both, her voice gone high, to come inside.

George and Johnny threw their arms across each other's shoulders and entered together. They were laughing, pounding each other's chests.

"I'm hungry," George demanded; loud, quick. Gladys, trembling, went to fix him some food.

George and Johnny stood awkwardly, but still half-entwined, in the center of the room, not knowing which of their thoughts to choose for words. At last, as if he'd come for tea, George looked around the bedroom-living room combination and commented approvingly, "Say, this is all right, Rue, this dump you got here!"

Johnny deprecated, "There's no hot water. You've got to heat the water. Otherwise, it's O.K."

"Well, ain't that just a goddam shame?" George asked, his voice suddenly rough as a thug's. "Ya got to heat the water!"

Johnny chortled, embarrassed. "Gladys found it," he mumbled. "She saw it in the papers. How— How'd you—" He stopped; it seemed to him it would be a great breach of etiquette to ask George how he'd found their new place.

"Your old man told me. Your mother wouldn't, she gave him hell."

"Oh. Listen, you want to wash up or anything before you eat?"
"O.K."

When George had gone to wash himself in the bathroom, Johnny went to the only other room, the kitchen, and stood, staring rather helplessly at Gladys' hands while she worked. She was stirring gravy in a frying pan, mixing milk and meat fat and flour. Her eyes immediately sought Johnny's; seemed to make some demand of him. At last his glance left the pan on the stove and climbed unwillingly, as if he were forcing it, to meet hers. A long look of communication held between them.

"You stay out of it, now," she muttered. "You stay out of all that Red stuff this time."

"You went for it more'n I did," he protested.

"Jus' for a little bit; till I got to see how they're all the same. Not him. But all the rest. They're all the same."

"Yeah."

"Set the table, Johnny."

He unfolded a card table in the other room, threw a cover over it, put the dishes around. "I got a feelin' he's finished with it too, Glad. He looks beat."

She nodded: George had struck her, also, as a man no longer believing.

They all sat down together, the Rues nervous and half-afraid, but not knowing what they feared, and George solemn, greedy.

"I'm glad we stopped off and got some things to cook on the way home," Gladys offered, timidly for her. "We just come back from Palm Springs, Geor— George." Yet her voice had named Palm Springs proudly, almost grandly.

"Palm Springs?" George grunted, trying to remember. "Oh, yeah. A bunch of rich Jews."

During the rest of the meal, Johnny and Gladys discussed, with each other, Palm Springs; they tried not to look at George and his new way of eating: he ate like a savage, or as if in defiance of every courtesy he'd ever learned. They were increasingly aware of the absurdity of talking about their trivial vacation to George, who had just returned from a foreign war, but they didn't know how to approach him.

When the serving bowls were all emptied and the Rues had finished eating, George reached with his fork and took a small piece of meat and gristle that Gladys had left on her plate. He chewed it with belligerent frankness. He was the only white person Gladys had ever felt close to, and she was aware now—each of his rude-little-boy acts made her more aware—that he had been hurt often and deeply in hidden ways; that he was even, at the very moment, in some sort of pain. She began to clear the dishes from the table, wanting to be away from him, to sort her impressions of him.

But George picked up his own dishes and took them to the

kitchen. Again, Gladys and Johnny exchanged a glance, wondering. They followed him to the kitchen sink and watched in surprise as he rinsed his plate and utensils under the cold water tap. Next he took a towel and wiped them and put them back on their shelves. Gladys wrinkled her nose at Johnny in disgust, but he ordered her with a glance to say nothing, and, besides, to follow suit. She could not obey: instead she returned to the other room and folded the card table. The little house seemed too silent to her, and the silence too heavy. Years ago, the three of them had often done the dishes together, but decently—with soap and hot water, with quarrels, conversation, jokes and laughter.

Pouting her lips and wrinkling her forehead, she stared at George through the doorway: during the long time he'd been gone, she'd never missed him so much as now.

When they were all seated again, Johnny, clearing his throat as if to warn that the worst was coming, confessed, "We got married."

George looked from one to the other, dumbly. Then he grinned, somewhat as he used to. "Fine. That's swell. Congratulations."

Gladys and Johnny almost gaped at each other; they'd expected to be reviled, or taunted at least.

George rose suddenly; it was his first movement even to suggest the athlete's quick economy of motion he'd once had. He walked to Johnny's easel, swiveled a lamp around to it: "What ya got here?"

It was a double portrait of colored friends of theirs, a young married couple, expecting their first baby. The man's face wore a yearning expression: it was obvious he wanted his woman back again as lover, as passionate slave; he sat looking at her longingly, his eyes resentful and betrayed, his heavy mouth pleading that youth had gone too soon. The woman had left him, and Johnny said as much in the very pose of her head. Her eyes were lost in dreaming of the creature she was making. She was extremely important; she had outgrown her man, and she felt toward him—it was conveyed even in the strong golden tone of her skin—only a pitying superiority. She would always have tenderness toward him, her mouth said, but only the tenderness of memory. She was as insuperable as the vision in her eyes—that, by creation, she could renew herself forever. The background was a swirl of amber: Johnny's sympathies lay with the man.

"You know what kind of underpainting I used?" And, when George didn't answer him: "I used violet. I never tried violet before. It was funny."

"She likes it," Gladys said in the quietness, "but he doesn't. In fact, he don't *a-tall*! The man in it. Not that it matters. They couldn't buy it anyway. Not that *that* matters either." She stopped, feeling absurd.

George grunted. He stared at the picture silently for a couple of minutes. Then, turning, he threw himself into his chair again. "So you stayed with it, huh, Rue? You stayed with it." He spoke musingly, as if to himself.

Johnny cleared his throat. Gladys took some knitting from a drawer and fell to working on it. A little of her nervousness drained out through her fingers.

"So far," Johnny said. And cleared his throat again.

Gladys wanted to say, "And that's only the half of it!" but contented herself with making the observation silently.

"So you stayed with it." George muttered again.

Gladys could stand it no longer. She commanded briskly, "Tell us what it was like over there, George!"

"What it was like over there," he repeated after her, strangely. "What it was like over there." He looked at the painting again. "You plan to do much more on it, Rue? You going to leave her hair like that? You want his chin that vague? What about that half-assed background?"

Johnny licked his lips. For a long time the only person he'd been able to talk to about painting was Robb, and Robb was kind. His hands massaged his forearms. He plunged: "I figure—that one's about done, Morley."

George made a croaking sound, but his face showed no change of expression. After a while, he admitted, "I don't know anything about it any more. I don't know as much as a ten-year-old child."

"Did you—get to *see* anything, over there?" Johnny inquired, hesitantly. "I mean, like in coming or going, even? Like I remember how you always were about Goya. You used to be nuts about Goya."

Then from George loudly, crazily: "What it was *like* over there!" He shot himself up from the chair, stood gaunt and tall in the center

of the room. He addressed Gladys exclusively for a moment, then included Johnny in the show. "What it was *like* over there, the little lady wants to know!" he ranted. "I'll *show* you!" He began by making the sounds of planes sweeping down low and fast from the clouds. Then he ran about the room with his right arm outthrust, and clasped that elbow with his left hand so as to point the arm at them like a weapon, a tool to strafe them with; he threw bombs at them like a mortar; he tossed hand grenades at them, he shot them with rifles, massacred them with machine guns. And everything he did he accompanied with the proper imitations of sounds—whistles, bangs, engine roars; at one point he was a whinnying horse, a second later a screaming Spaniard begging for his *madre*. He subsided on the floor then, spent, hollow-voiced. He confided, "I watched a guy burn to death once; took quite a while. I watched a woman being raped once. I knew her. Name was Maria. She was always saying it was better to die on your feet than live on your knees. Ha! She died on her back: while this guy was raping her, another guy came along and cut her head off. Yeah, you could say I got to see a lot, I guess." Without inflection: "I forget whether it was coming or going, though, Rue."

Gladys felt the skin on her face prickling: the horror had been his weird resemblance to a small boy, playing at fierce games.

She went to the kitchen for a drink of water. A drop escaped the glass, ran down her neck, stopped between her breasts. The little accident struck her as so musing, so hilarious and vile, that she knew she must be on the verge of hysteria.

She heard Johnny muttering, "What I was askin', George, what I meant to ask: look, I was just wondering if you'd got to see any, well, like any art galleries or anything like that over there. The way they're supposed to have so much." She felt his humility and embarrassment as if they were her own; suddenly she began to weep and laugh at once, soundlessly.

She cradled her face in her arms, so that her strangled gasps would not be heard.

"No. I'm sleepy," George mumbled, as if aching tired. He belched, a loud rolling practiced belch, and closed his eyes.

Johnny and Gladys pulled their own folding bed down from its

niche in the wall and half-carried him to it. They made a bed for themselves on the kitchen floor, and lay clasped tight in each other's arms, without motion or words, and far from sleep.

In the morning, Johnny happened to see, abandoned on the stoop, the newspaper that had been George's pillow. He read its headlines three or four times because he knew they must be mistaken.

They said Stalin and Hitler had signed a mutual nonaggression pact.

He gave Gladys a soft whistle to come outside, George being still asleep; and explained to her, showing her the thing, "It's about like if Richard Wright should get up somewhere and make a speech for white supremacy."

She jerked her head in George's direction. "Was that the reason—do you suppose—last night?"

"Partly it was, anyway, probably. Because this could be a pretty terrible thing: it could hit a guy pretty hard, Glad, if he still believed in it."

Down at Laguna Beach, they were prostrate at the news. They groaned as they sprawled on the floor. They had to drink a little more than usual, and more solemnly. They prophesied, their eyes bloodshot at two o'clock in the morning, that this was the beginning of the end. And Robb Nixon, just about to begin his fourth year of teaching at the Long Beach City College, less than an hour's drive from Laguna Beach, where he lived, found his patience with them—the whole glib colorful arty set for which Laguna was famed—strained to the breaking point.

They had never believed in Stalin or Communism, or, so far as he could see, in much of anything; they had no right to feel betrayed.

They said that just as Christianity had united with the Hun long ago to ruin ancient Rome, so now the Soviet Union—the new Christianity—had united with the Hun—that same Hun without the slightest change—to destroy culture. And they themselves, splendid stanchions of culture that they were, could expect nothing but to

be trampled under foot, demolished, beheaded, and forced, eventually, to produce the sickening sort of art Hitler liked. They could not respect themselves, they insisted, unless they created; and they couldn't create except in freedom; and soon there'd be no freedom in the world. He reminded them—suddenly despising his popularity with them—that he'd often heard them praise Hitler's success with mass euthanasia, and that those of them who'd been to Europe were forever lauding Germany as the most thoroughly advanced and modern country in the world; he pointed out, so angry he stuttered, that they were always laughing at France as if she were some poor foolish once-famous once-beautiful aunt who'd taken up prostitution to ease the boredom of senility, and that ever since he'd known them they'd been calling the United States the Land of Babbitt.

They smiled at him sadly, saying he hadn't understood them.

He became something less than coherent; blurted, "Take you, Estelle, with that damned green fingernail polish you brought back from Germany last year! And going around calling everybody Gretchen!" Then, annoyed with himself for having selected, in stupid haste, such petty details, he became doubly annoyed at his friends; because, typically, they all began defending the green fingernail polish and the Gretchening quite seriously. He knew that if he'd accused them, instead, of tolerance for Hitler's pogroms ("There *can* be such a thing as too many Jews!") or even of sympathy to the Nazi ban on psychoanalysis ("But who wants to *live* any more, if *everything's* going to be *expelled*?"), they would probably have answered him very differently, either denying the truth or twisting the truth into a joke. It seemed impossible ever to discover any real sincerity in them, an impression that had been growing on him for some time; and now he said so. In a rare temper, he ordered them—since they'd happened to gather in his little ocean shack that night—to go home.

Robb had not believed in Communism, but he had believed in George, and George had believed in Communism enough to fight, and perhaps to die, for it. When news of the pact came out, he suddenly felt sure, for the first time, that George was dead.

When it occurred to him that since Stalin felt no aversion toward Hitler, he might shortly be expected to feel none toward Mussolini or even Franco, he almost hoped George *had* died: for how could

he go on living with himself, having been proved such a fool, and how could he ever believe in anything again, after such gross betrayal? George had not been a great deal in his thoughts for years; but now memory recalled the passionate uncompromising zeal he'd had, and his ultimate selflessness, quite painfully. George was someone you couldn't fully appreciate, it seemed to Robb, until you'd lived in Laguna Beach for a year or two.

The next day he telephoned Terrence long distance, partly on the chance there might be news, partly for comfort.

Terrence was jubilant: Mr. Morley seemed definitely to be improving. He was eating better, his eyes looked better, he wasn't having any pain at all, he'd even told a risqué story that very morning, and was taking an interest in what was going on in the world again.

From Robb, dryly: "Good news is the best medicine, after all, eh?"

This remark obviously puzzled Terrence. After a moment, he said, "Why, no. No, Robb. There's been no good news. Nothing's come in on George at all."

Robb imagined how he looked, at the telephone: his eyes would have gone especially blue, with trying to understand. He sighed. Then patiently: "According to the papers, Terrence, Stalin appears to be turning from the western powers—from the democracies, you know—and allying himself with the Fascist boys, and it just isn't at *all* what anyone expected: England and France and Russia have all been negotiating like mad (don't you remember, just a month ago when I was up there, when Mr. Morley and I were talking about it?) to form a common front against Germany. Ever since Munich, last year— Well, never mind. I was just wondering what Mr. Morley thought about it."

"Shall I tell him there's good news?"

"No, no, Terrence, don't tell him there's good news. Well, what are you doing? What are you up to?"

"I'm teaching Mr. Morley to draw. It's fascinating. Then when he's resting or sleeping, I've been doing primitives."

"Primitives? Good God, you're no primitive! I thought that used to be one of your pet hates."

"It did. It still is, but when I watch him draw I get to thinking like a primitive. I mean feeling like one. Besides, I'm beginning to

see what people mean when they say 'witty.' Like Paul Klee is supposed to be so witty, for example."

"And so now you're going to be—witty? Brother! Have you said anything to McNaughton about this, Terrence?"

"I told him."

"Any comment?"

"Not much. Just: 'Heaven save us, Mrs. Davis, may the mercies lave us all!'"

After they'd laughed, Terrence modestly complained, "I know you—and everybody—thinks I'm such a fool." But it was clear he minded very little: he knew they also thought him such a painter.

Robb agreed pleasantly, "Not at all. The harshest words I ever hear about you are that you don't grasp things readily."

Terrence flushed slightly, but laughed again. "You can all go to hell, you know. I never said I was a genius."

"And don't you do it either, kid: 'genius' has turned into a pretty bad word. At least with this set down here. The only thing anybody wants to be now, is nervous. Or rather, all they want to be known for are 'fine nervous lines.' Oh, yes, and some of 'em like to be perceptive. They like to have shafts of perception quite a bit."

"No kidding? I always thought that was just for writers. Or did you mean just the poets?"

"I mean *everybody* down here—sculptors, painters, schoolteachers, bartenders—*everybody* has shafts of perception. At least twice a week."

"That time I was down there with you, they were all being dynamic."

"Dynamic's old stuff now. In fact, 'ironic staticism bids fair to take its place. Bids quite fair.'"

"God! *Ironic staticism!* Well, I shouldn't think you'd complain about a few little primitives, then."

"I wasn't really complaining: everybody should be permitted a goofy phase now and then, the way I see it. Send me a couple."

Terrence promised to. Robb sent his regards to Mr. Morley, and the conversation was finished.

As he had no phone in his own little shack, he'd gone to a public booth to make the call. The toll came to several dollars, a charge he

thought absurdly small: walking away from the station, he felt completely refreshed, as though he had again been friendly with reality itself; or as though he'd been reassured of some basic truth. He would go home and try to do something in oils, he decided, something quite modern, perhaps something entirely nonobjective. Then, between a step and a step, he knew he'd take a stream of blue, a stream that was yet a solid, and let it find a broad rough path, vertical, or vertical leaning to diagonal, across the canvas. The stream would bear a cone—to the far right, close to the top of the canvas—a soft loose cone that might suggest the movement of wind-tormented shrubs, or the toss of a perfumed head of hair, or the net-spreading of a lying smile. This cone to be in chartreuse, and it must be a subtle offering from the stream, a first uneasy offspring. And on the left, yet somewhat closer to the center, the blue might grow a tall column that was very real, a statement of fact, expressed surely and boldly, probably in magenta. He felt joy hurrying through his chest, warming his veins. The blue must not be remote, it had to be a deep yet pure blue; the most important thing in the painting—next to the force and conviction of the magenta pillar—would be the rightness of this shade of blue, because of course the blue was life itself, or at least the part of life that was art; and the cone—his dramatic, pirouetting friends of Laguna Beach; and the valiant bar, growing but certain, no one but Terrence. That genius or fool or both, Terrence, so constant to the hard single purpose!

Robb promised himself that if he could catch this shade of blue, half the painting's battle would be won, because the lying cool chartreuse should be easy, so like the fingernails of a pretty fake named Gretchen, and the strong truth of the magenta ought not to be too difficult, indeed simple if he could just remember how he felt right now, how intensely *real* he felt right now.

He knew joy; his hands were eager to shape truth; he hurried.

The telephone conversation with McNaughton wasn't reassuring; after it, Virgil had the impression it'd been carried on by ghosts. McNaughton's voice, as he had remembered it, was languid rather than drugged, bored rather than blurred, disenchanted rather than

complaining. The wires must have been distorting: there'd not even been much joy in McNaughton's tone at hearing his name. They were to have diinner together the following night, true; but there seemed to be very little hurry about it, even so. For the first time Virgil questioned the point of their old established scorn for eagerness.

He saw a young dark-haired girl crossing the street, a schoolgirl, long-legged, not much past puberty. She reminded him, by her deliberateness, her determined poise, of McNaughton and himself when they'd been her age. And Hogarth's companion in oppositeness to her, "The Shrimp Girl," bounced jauntily into his mind as the perfect answer to all three of them. He imagined her appealing to him for trade, and saw himself respond with the proper coin, delighted for her being so warm and single-purposed. All the same, they'd simply not been made like that, McNaughton and he. Their brains had been from birth too involuted for simplicity.

And they'd known at the age of five, somehow, that no emotion was pure, and nothing unalloyed. In the long run it was best to conceal, best to belittle intensity, eagerness, joy—if only to lessen the difficulty of pretending otherwise when their antipodes happened to be in power.

The girl passed from sight. But the flicker of rebellion he'd felt at her young sophistication would not quite extinguish itself; and puzzled him by remaining.

Then he realized who it was she'd suggested, by oppositeness, to him: Vanya Rubin, Abraham Irving's niece. Vanya should be about the girl's age by now, and as dark as she, but it was impossible to imagine her ever paying such homage to the rules, impossible she'd ever need so acutely to be blasé. The very thought of Vanya reassured him, somehow, almost as much as Hogarth had; surely she'd be experiencing the shrimp girl's intensity about something or other by now: she'd be a zealous antivivisectionist, or she'd be raging against Jim Crowism, or else ardently in love with Bette Davis. Suddenly he longed to see her. He wanted to be with Abraham and Vanya again almost overpoweringly, all in a moment; and wondered if Abraham would be in his shop, if he went there now.

Then he smiled at himself, understanding the trick his mind had played on him. Abraham's shadow had always lain between Mc-

Naughton and himself, by reason of his having chosen to be disloyal to McNaughton (because it *was* disloyal, in those days, not to share such newness as Abraham had been) rather than to betray a stranger's confidence. And certainly McNaughton must have sensed something withheld. Now, put off a trifle, slightly disappointed—or perhaps merely left wondering—by the telephone conversation, his mind turned automatically to Abraham. "Abraham, I am no ghost. I was real, you knew it. See me again, talk to me again; be precisely as you were. Restore me to the reality McNaughton just denied."

He walked about idly on the San Francisco streets, preferring them, though with condescension, to the choked avenues he'd come from in New York.

But what should he have done, that wintry afternoon in 1933? And afterward?

He'd been so young, and the Jew (because Abraham had been first a Jew, *the* Jew, before becoming Abraham) had said, "Perhaps we shall even be friends. Who knows? If I deliver myself—" He'd sat in the tiny private office of his shop, and had cradled his head in his hands—and at last had looked up at Virgil humbly—humbly but with his immeasurable pride.

He'd said, his ancient face almost a Byzantine Christ, the eyes fierce and tragic, "If I deliver myself."

"Really, Mr. Irving—"

"Give me half an hour. Because I am going to explain—for the first time in my life to someone else, not to myself—what I can do for money and what I cannot." He had motioned Virgil to the only other chair.

And had begun by describing his life in Odessa before the Bolsheviks: the prosperous young art merchant, respected, active, prominent, ambitious. So in love with his wife as to seem almost idolatrous to his own mind. "We were altogether different people, not like each other. And we were the same one. Two were one, and the one divided into two parts: a mystery. We were selected for each other; they married us several years before the Revolution. Every day we were married it was—*more* with us. I adored her: she was the world, she was my life in the world; she was all of it. And when the order came—that Odessa would be cleared of Jews within four days, when this order came—"

He paused, waiting for his voice to steady. "Our first son, Mr. Benthwick, you see, was two years old. Walking, talking, discovering something new every hour. We were very proud: we thought, oh this is a great baby! I think my wife believed he was the *only* baby who ever laughed or ran around or would give you a toy, handing it up to give as a present: nothing ever so wonderful before."

They heard Vanya singing, half a dozen words drifting to them, "Sounds of the rude world, heard in the day"; and then the assistant quieting her.

More firmly: "It happened my wife was about to be delivered of another child, just at that time. There were no appeals allowed, however. The aged and the sick, and the new mothers or those about to become mothers, or the tiny children—there were no exceptions allowed. All of us were to leave within four days. And two days before the final hour, our second son was born."

Virgil noticed his voice was very sure now. He was talking about what had happened to someone else, or had not happened at all; it could not have happened to him, his tone seemed to say, for if it had happened to him, it would have turned him mad.

"And I think I mentioned to you we made the trip chiefly on cattle cars. Trans-Siberian Railway, from the Ukraine to the Orient. Perhaps you can imagine: no seats, and so crowded together my wife lay sometimes across our laps, my sister and I holding her—Vanya's mother, my sister, younger than I. It was our only warmth, the heat of our bodies. And of course we could all see that the little one, the one just born, was not to be alive for very long. So it was almost the most pitiful part that he lived as long as he did: otherwise the older child could have been given all his mother's milk." When Virgil made an involuntary exclamation, Abraham held up a hand. "Mr. Benthwick, it is very necessary for me to tell you this story, because it is how I changed from who I was to who I am. We were allowed to take everything we could carry with us. Only the fools took anything but bread, food. We baked enormous loaves of bread, because that would last longer. Twelve loaves, I think our party had twelve or fourteen loaves. Sometimes the peasants met us at stops, to give us a little food. They were ashamed. They were hungry too, but more ashamed. But in most places it was forbidden to give to us; food was very short throughout the country: even many who were not Jews

were starving. When our baby died, I thought at least now there will be more for the boy, and to tell you the truth I was almost glad. But then my wife—could give no more milk at all.” Absently, he touched the Degas pastiche that stood on his desk. “My son tried to eat the lice—we were by now covered with lice—and my sister tells me I went mad and tried to kill him.” He tapped a pencil against the large onyx paperweight before him. “That is something I have no memory of. Anyway, if it is so, I was prevented. Because both my wife and he lived until we reached Yokohama—”

“Good God!”

“I began to think not: not a good God. So do you remember I spoke to you so highly of the Jewish welfare organizations? When we were driving here?”

Nodding. The gray-brown of a page from Dostoevsky. Virgil felt the texture of horror sticking to his mind.

“Well, when we were met by them there, many of us fell at their feet, these men, kissing their hands. It was not so unusual in the Old Russia, to be so extravagant. For two or three days then it seemed my wife might live. Yes. And our boy was clean, at least, before he died.”

“Mr. Irving—”

“Vanya’s mother and I were given the chance to come here to this country, to San Francisco—all the borders of Europe were closed to us. The most fortunate thing for us, surely, was that we had to work so hard. Especially at night, learning English in school. She said, Vanya’s mother, that it must not happen again. And she would devote her life to help see it would not.”

“Unbearable, unbelievable!”

“So? Two words I can never understand. What does unbearable mean? One bears whatever there is to bear. Unbelievable? The only way not to believe is to go mad. But she believed she must help fight the thing. She became almost a preacher, she is in Germany right now, warning against Hitler! If the way to live is to invite death, I tell her, she will live forever.”

“And—Vanya?”

Half-apologetically: “To the zealot, Mr. Benthwick, you must know a child and husband are nothing but encumbrances. She divorced the one, and assigned the other to me. But *this* is what I am

explaining," he gestured toward the pastiche. And then for twenty seconds explained nothing at all but sat quite still, clearly gathering courage.

"So now, Mr. Benthwick, this is what I am explaining." Pointing to the little black sticker on its heel, "This is for my assistant. It means, to her, that someone has made me a bid on whatever article wears it, or that I have promised someone a trade. Either way, the article is not to be sold without my consent. As a rule I have only one—marked so, that is with a black sticker, in my shop. And often, often, I have none at all." He smiled ruefully, "I wish it had been the case today."

They looked straight into each other's eyes, silent, for a long while.

"What it means, of course, is that I am reserving such articles for special patrons. For patrons who make it clear my profile is not to their liking."

"Eh?"

"Yes. Not a pleasant joke, is it? In fact, a cruel joke; and I enjoy it very much. I am saying, Mr. Benthwick: Only if I am sure the customer could have ordered us on that train, *would* have ordered us on that train, that day in Odessa—only to him, the special items. You follow? For example, perhaps you are aware no nose resembling mine has ever spent a single night in any Hayes-Taylor hotel? No? Well, believe it. Yet I have been honored to counsel Mr. Hayes-Taylor himself into purchasing several objects of art, all black-stickered. And just now there is a new bonfire being laid, the kerosene being sprinkled on it lavishly, especially for my people: a movement called Social Justice. One of its chief supporters—I keep track of our friends—was pleased to enter this shop several months ago; I amuse myself ever since by imagining Father Coughlin may have been presented with his selection! More recently, I had the privilege of assisting the wife of a prominent North Carolina Silver Shirt in making a purchase—A good proportion of honest money—what I think of as *mine*—goes to Jewish welfare organizations, but of course every dollar, every cent of *theirs* is given; I think that particular lady would be amazed at her own generosity. Now I am longing next to make a donation for some Defender of the Christian Faith in Kansas, but unfortunately no Defender of the Christian Faith in Kansas seems to

have much interest in art." Looking up suddenly, "Mr. Benthwick, I would not have sold you the Degas. Do you believe me?"

Without hesitation: "I've never believed anyone more. I give my word I haven't."

Abraham inclined his head a moment. Then, again with a trifling slyness, with almost wistful humor: "Degas is an artist I especially enjoy. Hilaire Germain Edgar Degas, the most eager of them all to have placed us on that train."

And when, at the last, the question had been asked again, "You do not name me brigand?" there'd been only one answer Virgil found possible: "I name you friend, Mr. Irving."

"Abraham."

"Abraham. Please: Virgil."

He'd never even considered sharing him with McNaughton.

The intensity he experienced in wanting to see Abraham again returned, increased. A crazy image lighted his brain: himself kneeling; Abraham placing a black sticker on his forehead.

"For my sins against truth, reality?" he inquired respectfully.

"For your sins against truth, reality."

"An emblem of forgiveness?"

"Nothing so small. An emblem of recognition."

The idea of the painting he attempted remained real to him, although, after two or three hours' work, Robb Nixon began to wish it would not. The idea was so much more acute than his technique, he recognized its need for a better artist. He struggled until the paint became simply paint, not a medium for expressing truth. He struggled until the canvas' weave became an absorbingly clever pattern, mockery to his own clumsiness.

"Christ!" And he put his tools away, bored even with the scent of turpentine, angry at the careful balance of a brush. He wished he didn't know as much about painting as he did: wished he couldn't see so well how much he lacked of being an artist.

But you're not an artist, he reminded himself, reassuringly. *Really*

not an artist, and who ever said you were? A fair craftsman, at the very best. What you are: a teacher. Pretty good at it, and God knows it's not an easy thing to be good at. Pretty damned good at it, some days.

When his tools were cleaned and put away, he sat still, wondering what real artists—people like Terrence, for example—experienced at such moments of failure. And felt glad he himself didn't have to endure it, whatever it was: if he were left unsatisfied, disappointed, they must be miserable.

He looked up at one of Terrence's sketches, hanging on the wall.

A longing to watch Terrence at work once again possessed him. He would like to be in the studio, absolutely silent, invisible even, but merely studying the informed hands, seeing the tilt of that head as its eyes criticized, corrected—

But then Terrence might possibly grow discouraged too, fail perhaps; and with tired eyes turn from work to him, find him, now suddenly visible, and recognize him. Recognize him? As friend, as someone utterly to be trusted, as advisor, confidant, admirer, as Robb.

As voluntary slave, as helpless adorer, no; that part had been outlawed, by mutual consent. It was blinded and stricken dumb, through the surgery of prohibition. Yet never destroyed; it was incapable of annihilation. Couldn't be seen or heard, so wasn't troublesome; couldn't be destroyed, so wasn't forgotten. One hour every other year, perhaps, the longed-for, despised, incomprehensible, greater closeness—though never to be mentioned by Terrence later, never accepted.

"Never?" Robb asked himself, rock-still, puzzled with nothing new. "Never destroyed, but never permitted to live?" And formed the answer, for the hundredth time, not liking it: love was an illness, not so curable as some, though a man did not die of it.

He rose, stretched, told himself he wanted a drink or two and a little food. He considered preparing something for himself. But he'd troubled to clean the kitchen just the evening before: messing it up again merely for himself seemed a monstrously conceited thing to do. He'd go instead to one of the restaurants in town.

At its door, he discovered the place of his choice was closed. Disappointed, he walked on, wondering which other to visit.

After a block or two, the sign of the Dumas caught his eye. Embarrassment's cousin introduced itself to him; suggested he avoid the Dumas.

Yet he remembered hearing—word had gone round cleverly, disguised as advertising—that the place had turned respectable. He grimaced sardonically: three months out of every year, on an average, the Dumas was “respectable.”

An amusing lie. The place was more discreet, or less discreet; certain overt liberties were permitted one season, not permitted in another; but the Dumas would never “go respectable” until its hall-mark was changed: until its murals were painted over.

He wondered if it might possibly have been done this time, felt a little more concerned than merely curious; and decided to go in.

The murals had not been touched. He would stay, then, for just one drink. Not for a second drink, not for food. Embarrassment's cousin whined that he should leave immediately; he dismissed her.

He wanted to sit on the western veranda because it was unglassed and the ocean waves crashed thirty feet from its supports. But all the tables were occupied there: he must choose between sitting at the bar or in the restaurant proper, both enclosed. The bar, then. But at a seat not facing the murals; facing the ocean, rather.

Read his fellows at a glance: at least half of them had come merely for drinks, for the ocean view, for the coolness of shelter. Perhaps a fourth had come out of curiosity. Only the last fourth had come because it was theirs, their place, their town hall, plaza, sanctuary, courting place, healing place, their corner of the world.

He ordered a drink, and, protected by the large dark glasses he wore habitually now—designed especially for him so that they admitted almost no light and concentrated what they did admit directly to the pupils of his eyes—he studied his companions at leisure, carefully, concluding that his first quick surmise was correct: saw the married couple sitting with their infant at a table, and at the table next them two youths who looked scented but unbathed; saw the classic young blonde murmuring to her aging tycoon protector in one corner; in the corner opposite, a group of orthodox businessmen titillating themselves with orthodox stories; finally, the middle-aged buyer glancing about in haughty lechery for his selection, beginning

to favor—somehow half-cruelly—a young narcissist with hair bleached almost white.

Robb tried to limit his perceptions exclusively to his drink; it was, as he'd expected, excellent.

Yet at the next moment, his mind began jabbing at the broken tooth, idiot-fashion, to see if it still throbbed: he turned a little on the bar stool, the better to study the murals.

Small strips depicting Roman bacchanals—all in reddish brown against pale green. No one panel could be called obscene, but taken together they expressed something unspeakably evil. Suggesting in every line that he knew what he was doing and that all the ugliness was deliberate, the artist had said precisely what he thought he was being paid to say: that all sexual relations were degrading, and that some were more vile than others; that all love was lust, and all lust vice; and that there were techniques of viciousness known to the mighty and sophisticated far surpassing, for the transports of evil, those limited techniques of viciousness known to the average man. The emperor and the shepherd and the soldier and the prison inmate and the scholar and the deformed by nature joined here behind locked doors, the artist said, to taste the sweetest vileness. He named for choicest lechery the alley-ecstasy, the unlighted stinking public-washroom thrill, and no policeman could take offense at his language: he said what he said in the lines of a dancing, drunken goat's hindquarters, or in the billowing of a torn, wine-stained toga. He assured the curious "normal" tourist immediately that yes, he had indeed found the right place. Robb granted angrily that whatever had been paid for them, the murals must have been worth it, over the years.

He was about half finished with his drink when a young man—perhaps three years younger than himself, Irish-looking in a handsome blue-black way, of good physique, and rather forcefully masculine—entered alone and took a seat at the bar. Robb classified him almost instantly: the purchaser of the first drink, the aggressor with the first smile. Not the sort whose very hair tonic is suspect, not the kind whose cuff links announce what his tongue dares not; rather, the sort for whom the cuff links and pomade are worn. The young man sat smoking a cigarette, making a ceremony of every puff, and

looked carefully at his neighbors and at himself in the bar mirror all the while. Whenever he took a sip from his drink it was in so disinterested a way as to amount to a statement. Yet at the same time, despite his casualness and bravado, he never lost a certain indescribable air of being hunted.

And Robb admitted it was this very air—this subtle watchful wariness—he found among the most painful of all things on earth. He saw that the young man did not sit simply, as any man might sit in any bar, or with relaxed assurance of his own appeal, as a man might sit in the Dumas, but rather that he sat with ponderous and bristling self-consciousness; Robb recognized easily that here were the twin agonies: shame, and the desperation of desire. Remembering its own humiliations, his heart turned heavy with sympathy.

A sensation he'd often experienced before, the sensation of being trapped, of being eternally bound to ugliness—and, at that, to ugliness imposed from the outside, some filth not native to himself—gripped him. Yet what had happened to him a hundred times before now happened again: at the moment of feeling most lost and desperate, indeed at the very moment of not despising death, he involuntarily recalled the forbidden face, longed for the body that was taboo, and remembered the union that had occurred, blazing the skies to him, dissolving the earth. His glance focused at last, caught the young bathers in the ocean; they were every one Terrence.

Sighing, he shook himself; finished his drink, prepared to leave. And suddenly, something about that young Irish-looking fellow who'd just come in struck him as familiar; surely, he was an old acquaintance. Robb had the impression: in costume, at a play. Somewhere he'd known him at any rate, not well, yet it seemed now well enough to have been a trifle concerned about him. About—how curious!—his future.

He muttered, "My God!" involuntarily, remembering. Because they'd met two years ago, or surely not more than three. The young man's name was Karl; and he wasn't of Irish ancestry, but Swedish. They'd met at his wedding reception.

It had been held in the starched inhibited piety of the Whittier Women's Club House: one hundred celebrants, all stiffly circumpect or timidly, slightly tipsy; the men subdued, groomed to the

garters, attentive to their plates of cake; the women flopping big-brimmed hats and gesturing with gloved hands . . .

The kind of reception at which the nonintoxicating punch is twice as popular as the champagne, and dear old ladies remember when the wedding dress was new, and no one mentions sex. Precisely right for its setting: Whittier, California—churchy village of seventeen thousand, proud of its citrus, content to bear the name of a poet who'd admitted hearing "fitful music/Of winds that out of dream-land blew," and fully as self-satisfied as Pasadena.

Robb attended as escort to Mrs. Dorothy Rossitier; the bride had been her pupil.

When she'd left her post at the University of California to be reunited with her husband years before, Dorothy had done it abruptly, without notice; so on finally separating from him, she'd consequently been hard put to find another place. When Whittier had unexpectedly opened its doors to her, she'd rushed to it with relief. But after a couple of years as instructor of Art at the college there, she'd come to consider most of its natives so proper as to be stifling, and the place itself as emptily prettified as an orange blossom. Visiting Robb in Laguna a day or so before the reception, she'd warned: "Dearest, if you *are* going to be angel enough to take me to this wedding thing, be sure you remember to keep your distance, because now that I'm finally divorced, everyone's terribly worried I may not remain frustrated. I mean chaste."

When he'd laughed at her for exaggerating the interest value of their attachment, she'd insisted, "Not a bit, baby. And besides, we're both *Art* teachers, and that's a terribly suspect situation by itself."

"You mean, we—we may have been," he whispered the horror, "*in life drawing classes* somewhere?"

"Laugh all you please. It remains that the Dean of Women keeps complimenting me so much for not smoking that I'm about to take it up."

Still, once she was at the reception, and wearing a remarkable hat she'd decorated with petrified gold-glazed mushroom buttons, she seemed to Robb to be genuinely enjoying herself. Actually, she was remembering that she'd been truly fond of the bride, a child both kind and pretty; she joined the "Lovely girl!" choruses without irony.

And Karl pleased her; she was meeting him for the first time, but the touch of his hand in the reception line was warm and gentle, and she guessed at some rebel's laughter running through him. After a glass of champagne, she even grew a bit misty-eyed, a rare thing for her, by contrasting the promise of this marriage with the wreck of her own. She missed self-pity narrowly—and only by wishing so hard for the young couple's happiness that it amounted to an exercise in magic.

Robb read in her face precisely what was in her mind; he forgot her prohibition and touched her lovingly on the shoulder; she turned to him gratefully and smiled, all the freckles smiling under that foolish hat, and she brushed his hand with hers. He sipped champagne and told himself how good a person she was, and how fond he was of her, and how much he would always love her; sipped the champagne, and felt the familiar helpless memory of having been in love, a very long time ago, with her.

But then he watched the best man, lithe and quick and graceful, slip easily through the little throng surrounding the bridal couple and come smiling up to Karl and murmur something, apparently some intimate joke, into his ear—with the result that Karl's face reddened and he laughed and his eyes flashed. They began pounding each other on the shoulders, vigorously, choking with laughter. They seemed to Robb like mischievous gamins dressed in careful disguise: the disguise of sober, earnest, respectable children who really did like Sunday school. Just their boutonnières were right, he thought; they would somehow certainly love boutonnières.

He heard someone say, "They're always such fun together, those two! They've been closest friends since grammar school!" The groom, still chortling, still slightly flushed, straightened his close friend's tie.

And then Robb noticed, in the best man's face, a disturbing thing: it was a familiar face; it was the bride's face.

He felt himself becoming uneasy without knowing why, and half-nervous. "Is he, is the best man—the bride's brother, or something?" he asked Dorothy sharply.

"Of course, didn't you notice?" she answered. "They're twins."

What self-knowledge Robb had gained, at that time, he still couldn't quite believe, and he found it the sort of thing almost impossible to believe in connection with anyone else, or at least in con-

nection with anyone not rouged and mincing and absurd. He told himself there was no reason to feel this chill of fear for the marriage, or to speculate so detestably.

On the way home, Dorothy said, "Whatever else they may have for troubles, though personally I don't see why they should have *any*, it won't be money: his dad's one of the big oil tool manufacturers around here."

"So! And what does he do, Karl himself?"

"Still in college. The question seems to be whether he's going to become a concert pianist or go into Papa's business."

"I'm curious which it'll be. Keep me posted, will you?"

She yawned and took off her hat and admired her mushrooms and said she would. "I found these under the stove," she said. "They're the real thing, Robb baby, only petrified."

He looked at her fondly. "They were quite a sensation. I noticed half a dozen envious glances."

"Not fooling?"

"I'm not fooling."

"Good. Because about you and Monet, I always say: the Eye that sees everything and so exactly correctly!"

There'd been signs of how the boy might love and might desire love, Robb told himself now, but there'd been no intimation at all of this present darkness: a dozen Monets couldn't have guessed it. He rose and left the Dumas hurriedly. Imagined making a wry obeisance to the murals, acknowledging their victory.

When he was just a block away he saw what added to his disgust: Mr. Clark and Mr. Novak, irreproachably orthodox members of the Laguna Beach Vice Squad, on their way to the Dumas. He passed close enough to see their expressions—at once complacent, excited, cautious. They'd dressed so as to disguise themselves doubly: plain-clothesmen in clothes not plain. Mr. Clark wore a shirt blazing with hibiscus flowers; Mr. Novak's wife's powder base was beginning to cake around his nose. In spite of his distaste, Robb had to smile; it didn't seem possible they could fool anyone; they were like children playing Cops and Robbers.

Walking on, he thought about their assignment—to lead some hopeful fool into defenselessness, and then, in the stunning moment,

to smash him with a look of contempt, and in a voice rich with righteousness pronounce him under arrest; to haul him off to jail, and later to swear before a judge whose lust was legal that the nauseating thing was true. The system of entrapment had always appalled him before; today, probably because of the clumsily applied cosmetic, he thought it funny. Only someone very ignorant, or very drunk, or very desperate could possibly be taken in. He wondered what purpose such a deceitful trick served society. Was the illusion of conformity really so desirable a goal? Apparently; for it was the law of the land: if the nonconformist *will* exist, despite everything, he must at least *pretend* to have died—so wholeheartedly that even when the satisfaction he desires is offered, he'll deny having any desire whatever except the one he fakes! Standing at a street corner, waiting for the light to change, Robb shook his head: it was too much for him. That luminous flowered shirt, those thick-clogged pores! Again he smiled.

He'd almost reached his ocean shack when a thought occurred that made him stop abruptly: Karl had been stiff with newness to the thing, hadn't known how to behave, wasn't sure of himself, was, in fact, desperate.

"Oh, no. Merciful God, no!"

And by his very nature Karl would be the aggressor; he'd not even have the wit to wait and be approached!

Robb put the key in the lock, opened his door. He went inside, adjusted the shades for light gentlest to his eyes, began to grade a set of essays which explained the difference between carving and modeling in sculpture, the first of the year for an Art Appreciation course.

Carving is subtractive, whereas modeling is additive, and, in addition, modeling is two processes (whereas carving is only one), i.e., modeling and casting.

Well, that *was* a way of putting it. Probably a Math major, suffering acutely throughout the entire art course.

He told himself Karl was no concern of his. Besides, even if he would, what *could* he do? Burst in and trumpet: "Lad, away with me to safety! Yon hibiscus shirt conceals a sheriff's badge"?

The next paper began: *Carving is often done in wood*. One of the brighter youths, this, apparently.

And if Hibiscus should ask, "Who are you?" What then? A telephone call to the Dean to vouch for him?

A neatly typed paper:

In carving, the statue is visualized by the sculptor as surrounded by excess material. In modeling, the artist's problem is whether to preserve the feel of the original clay in the finished form, of whether he should be thinking of the final metallic character of bronze all along and just consider the clay no more than tissues of an embryo.

Yes, that wasn't bad. He'd gotten that point across to them pretty well, apparently. Dorothy had first taught him that. "Sweet lady," he muttered.

Or perhaps a call to Dorothy would do as well as one to the Dean? "Why, yes, I've been sleeping with Mr. Nixon on and off for half a dozen years now. Would you like me to sign an affidavit?" He could see her, furious with the police, stunned by the idea.

Lipstick-smearing:

Modeling is more sophisticated than carving, and lends itself to mass production better. In fact, modern industry is based on it.

Often they left his head whirling.

But actually he admitted it wouldn't even take courage for him to try to save Karl; just a modicum of common charity. He was well established in the community, and the Dumas was after all a public restaurant. Yet *was* there such a thing as being "well established"? He'd read somewhere about a police officer saying he didn't consider "certain individuals" to be human beings at all. If you were thrown into some sort of drunk tank and the other prisoners' manliness happened to be outraged by the mere thought of you—

He put the papers aside.

Standing, he wondered if he should wear a hat, so as to look less an albino; and was then immediately amused: he almost never thought of himself as being an albino any more, an agony exclusively for adolescence apparently, but naturally he'd think of it now, at this moment of preparing to do what he didn't want to do. Then suddenly the thing was urgent. He left quickly.

A glance into the Dumas assured him he'd at least not come purposelessly. Karl sat talking animatedly, Hibiscus to his left, Clogged

Pores to his right. The best thing Robb could think of was to have Karl called to the telephone, to have him paged. He crossed the street, entered a drug store, tried to plan swiftly.

But he couldn't remember Karl's last name; only a blurred sound, something like Nortvalk. Probably not right, he told himself; and began to grow slightly desperate. And the bride's name and her brother's, something like Phil and Phyllis or Stephen and Stephanie or— And what sort of message?

Nortvalk, with the Karl, turned out to sound close enough to bring him to the phone, loudly incredulous that anyone would know where he was. "Who's this?"

"That's not important, fellow. I'm just a friend of a friend of Marc and Marcia. And those two gentlemen you're entertaining are police."

No sound at all.

"Did you hear me?"

"Yes." Quite weakly: "Why're you—doing this? Why are you helping me?"

"I don't know. I think because you're such a fool."

"Were you—here? Just now?"

"How else d'you think I'd know?"

At last: "Where are you now?"

"What does that matter?"

"Please. It does. Please, whoever you are."

"What's wrong with you?" It sounded to Robb as if Karl were going to cry. "Get hold of yourself."

"I'm sorry. It's just that you sounded—like a human being. A human being! In a place like this!"

"Don't be an ass."

"Listen, whoever you are, let me meet you. Let me talk to you."

Robb said he was too busy, tried to make himself sound rushed.

But when the voice answered him humbly, defeated, "Sure. Sure, I understand. Thanks, anyway," he suddenly could not help himself—and gave his address carefully and tried *not* to sound rushed.

Then he stared at the receiver, hung it on the hook, and muttered, softly and bitterly, "What have you done now, Nixon, you God damned stupid fool?" Silently, his face guarded into expressionlessness, he argued that the appeal had been raw begging, and from someone acquainted with misery. But he walked home slowly.

"And after the affair had started, directly after the first time, I saw I'd undoubtedly pulled a boner. I can remember, lying there in the morning—in my apartment—thinking, 'You blasted idiot of a dolt, Benthwick, why in the name of God did you do *that*? The boss's wife! Why the boss's wife? Supposing you tire of her? You'll jolly well wait until she tires too!' And, to put it the gentlest: by now I'm tired *green*!" Virgil indicated the depth of his distress to McNaughton, over lobsters and wine at Alioto's Restaurant on Fisherman's Wharf; and smiled all the while, with the proper slight smile, and controlled his voice perfectly, so that both of them might pretend he wasn't in the least perturbed. "Still, it never occurred to me *he'd* have the slightest objection: it's so entirely obvious what she is. This whole thing must be old as the hills to him."

McNaughton nodded. A patent lie, Benthwick, he thought. You never supposed he'd know at all.

Virgil, emphatically nonchalant: "Not, of course, that I'd actually counted on his knowing."

McNaughton nodded. He asked if Virgil were really positive his employer knew he'd been cuckolded by him. "We can read so much into little things, the guilty fleeth when no man, and all that."

"Pursueth. Quite; I do agree." Virgil took a deep taste of the wine, let it warm his chest, let it try to warm his heart. "No; I'm positive."

"Why not pretend you don't know her? For example, the next time she calls you on the phone, y'know, just pretend you've never slept with her? A type of shock treatment."

"Oh? I, ah—I'm afraid you're not seeing her exactly, McNaughton. She doesn't precisely ask, you know, whether one remembers sleeping with her. She's quite astonishingly direct. Sometimes, even on the telephone—I mean *at* the office—as soon as she hears it's my voice, she'll say—"

And what she said made them warm, and alive, and secretly embarrassed, and it made McNaughton envious.

"Well, can't you tell her he guesses, for God's sake, and to be more discreet?"

A pause. A silence. Virgil wondered if McNaughton were, after all, quite so brilliant as they'd both for so long supposed. "Perhaps you're not getting the entire canvas; I mean, I'm not at all sure she cares."

"Eh?"

With the briefest glance, Virgil weighed him—and some part of his mind that had been McNaughton's for at least ten years experienced shock: he saw him to have been in solitary confinement too long, surrounded by too many librarians. "I'm not at all sure she cares, one slightest God damn, y'know, about whether her husband 'guesses' or not."

"Oh." McNaughton wondered deeply; but sensed he'd lost some degree of power, and would not lose more. Gravely: "I see."

Virgil praised the wine.

They'd returned to Alioto's now, during Virgil's vacation from New York, partly for sentimental reasons, partly because of its excellent cuisine, partly for the vitality of its color: at Alioto's, the waiters' uniforms were feast day costumes of Sicilian fishermen—soft-knit betasseled caps, corduroy doublets in a growing shade of green, full-sleeved shirts made from satin-like material, tight wide waistbands, boyish trousers; and the men themselves, almost all gourmets and mostly of European birth, moved about easily, quickly—even the fat ones. They fetched and served the steaming trays of food as if each dish were a prize, and almost to a man they seemed as happy as the guests to be there. It was a place to look out widely on San Francisco Bay: small fishing craft docked just a couple of yards from its windows. Finally, it was inexpensive. McNaughton and Virgil had found it years before, when its inexpensiveness had been important.

Virgil praised the wine, but to them both his voice sounded overly formal, too polite. To McNaughton it sounded, also, faintly patronizing. Therefore, fighting for his old superiority, he attacked the flavor of the lobsters: "No use even trying to compare western with eastern, Benthwick. A lobster should have a tail. As a woman is of no consequence without one, a lobster likewise. You must be being kind—eating like that," he gestured toward Virgil's plate. "I'd forgotten how spoiled a palate you must've developed." He spoke crossly.

"Not at all. These are delicious." Virgil knew his suit was too much better, for one thing: tailor-made, light, comfortable. McNaughton had been demolished by New York three years before, sent home licking his wounds—yet he himself, trying it later, had been hired and paid well, though of course for prostitution: he felt humble and a little ashamed, and regretted wearing his fine new watch. Besides, he'd been complaining about that bitch, that burning condescending bitch, while McNaughton—a fact he saw for the first

time, suddenly and with sympathy—would probably never rate so much as a second glance from her kind of woman, at least not before the menopause. “No, really, I think that’s nonsense about eastern lobsters being so much superior to western. These are delicious. The only complaint I have at all is the crowdedness of the place: and that really just *doesn’t* seem fair—to flee the New York World’s Fair only to collide with the Golden Gate International Exposition!”

“Merely the most desperate—and obvious—effort to combat the recession, having them both at once.”

“True.” Had McNaughton always—well, *pontificated* so much?

For perhaps the first time in their lives, they were hard put to it for conversation.

New York was an impossible topic: McNaughton’s first letters had been too thrilled, his last had called it too often “a gray, dead trap of a city, as heartless as God—” Neither could they discuss San Francisco: McNaughton had gone hungry for weeks at a time before he’d finally been beaten into enduring U.C.’s graduate course in Librarianship, but now had been working for all of a year in the San Francisco Public Library. He directed patrons to rest-rooms and apologized for not stocking more of Edgar Rice Burroughs, and often he wished he were dead— About politics they agreed, and knew they agreed, too completely: both were bitter that the Falangists had won in Spain; both felt sure Hitler meant what he said about conquering the world (Stalin’s pact with Naziism disillusioned them not at all, his purges having disillusioned them years before); they both considered Mrs. Roosevelt faintly embarrassing but still the closest thing to a patron saint (witness Marian Anderson and the D.A.R.); and both distrusted her husband’s ambition for power but liked the things he did with it— Literature was taboo for a cruel reason. McNaughton’s poems were going the rounds of the publishers, and no matter how disdainfully he shrugged rejections off, the angry welts they left were visible— Art was gone also, because they were both intensely ashamed of Virgil’s way of earning a living: producing and arranging Renoirish ladies on cardboard layouts in such a way as not to distract from the advertising copy but to substantiate its claims regarding the use of Steinmetz Brothers’ Cosmetics— Sex had served them pretty well, Virgil making his mistress’ savage tantrums seem droll, but he hadn’t the heart to go on much longer: the savagery was beginning to show through.

When their silence began to drone on intolerably, McNaughton grew cross with himself: he was failing again, he was forever failing, it was the thing he did best. And it was he, not Virgil, who was to blame for the silence, because words were his field. He pondered his new dullness moodily: what was happening to him?

Then Virgil, beside himself: "So what's happening to you, lately, in connection with Ye Olde Supreme Basic Drive? Anything interesting?"

Still in moodiness: "I cannot say I've noticed any diminution of the death urge."

"Oh, come now, Schopenhauer!"

"You've got the name wrong. Wrong man. Not Schopenhauer. Mark Twain."

"Well anyway, anything of color?"

McNaughton shook his head. "I find myself increasingly willing to conform to the classic pattern of all male librarians."

"Great God, no! I'd always imagined it so masturbatory!"

"Sir!" For the first time, McNaughton laughed. "No, no. Our tradition: we read ourselves to sleep. We take home new books and read them and write little reviews, analyses, and then, for each review, we're permitted one half-hour off. Off work."

"And they're—printed somewhere, you mean?"

McNaughton shook his head. "We keep them in nice big cabinets."

"Oh. That's too bad. If there were any gravy on the table, I suppose we could drown in it."

"I would rather have my sweet, Though rose-leaves die of grieving, Than do high deeds in Hungary, To pass all men's believing."

"Quite. I don't suppose you happen to mean anything, in particular?"

"I mean: my sweet is wine. Ever more and more it is wine. And it is wine the table lacks."

Virgil ordered another bottle.

"There's a woman in love with me, Benthwick. And it's odd: I'm inclined to go in several directions at once. Not passionately or very quickly in any one direction, but still—" He seemed about to slip back into his silent moodiness.

"Well, may I ask first how the boudoir direction ranks? I mean, so I'll know what we're talking about?"

McNaughton gestured, his old languid gesture. "Nothing accomplished. And it's strange: my desire seems ignited rather more when she's away than when she's near. Y'see, she is—conventional, and a bit mother-ridden. I dare say she never *has*. Despite a fairly staggering—really overwhelming—bosom. She admires my poetry. Very much."

"An intellectual?"

"I suppose that would be the rough general classification."

"But a conventional intellectual?"

"It's harder for a woman, Benthwick."

Virgil was about to ask if she were young, beautiful; but decided the chances were too cruelly remote. "You mean, in essence, you're not sure the persuasion would be worth the achievement? I'm not meaning to be crude, but—"

"But of course you *are* being crude."

"Good God, you're not—in love with her?"

"No, excuse me. I apologize. It's just that her understanding of my poetry—is so sensitive, so right. You've no idea how much that means. And perhaps, to be painfully honest, I suppose it's also partly that her praise is usually—not stinting. And when you feel that a part of your mind is understood by someone, it's hard to be insolent about her own feelings. You see?"

"Of course." And decided he would risk it: "Very dangerous sentiments, all the same. Possibly the sort that might end in marriage." If McNaughton could be this humorless about himself, he simply was not McNaughton, or he was McNaughton turned a little mad.

"No. We've not discussed marriage, as between ourselves, but we *have* discussed the matrimonial condition in connection with *me*, appalling thought. And she definitely sees the impossibility of it, or, I should say, the unsuitability of it, for me."

Virgil stared. Then, recovering quickly: "I'd say it sounds the sort of thing that might best be left unconsummated, don't you think? With all those conventions?" A mother-ridden hypocrite was out to get McNaughton! "Especially since you don't want her too acutely when she's around. Only when she's not."

"But perhaps that's because at first she seemed so—well, unattractive to me. She seemed, really, coy. Y'know: pretty frightful."

"She seemed coy?"

"Decidedly coy."

Lightning flashed and thunder crashed. "Oh God, McNaughton." "What d'you mean?"

"I'm sorry. I really must say it: this isn't by any chance, you can't be talking about— You know there was a woman at the desk. Miss—Leckner?"

McNaughton flushed. "Oh, of course. I'd completely forgotten you'd seen her."

Virgil felt strangled. McNaughton *must* be mad. "Yes. And I did think, truly, she seemed a trifle—coy."

"She creates a very bad first impression."

"She's perhaps a—nervous type?"

"Unfortunately, she has a—nervous tic."

"Yes."

"Don't make fun of her, Benthwick: her mother is so dreadful. A fat whining porpoise of a mother, with a hairy chin, and such irregular teeth that there are strings of spittle—excuse me. Anyway: cannibalistic, psychologically. Actually, Iva (Miss Leckner: Iva Tillie) leads a pretty miserable life. And poetry is like a—*release* to her. She once said, of a poem I wrote: it was her Honduras vacation, in the fall. I mean that as an example. You've no idea what a thing like that—"

"But McNaughton, why wouldn't I have any idea? I mean, after all—"

"No. With painting it's there, the whole thing's there, and you can take it out and look at it any time. But with poetry, you build the thing up, word by word, and then the sum is supposed to—live, in someone else's mind. And it either does live or it doesn't. There's no inherent validity in poetry by itself, the way there is with a painting. Poetry is just odd little marks on paper, it has no reality in itself, or authenticity, unless it is real for a reader."

"And your work is—real, for Miss Leckner?"

McNaughton nodded, eyes downcast. Suddenly he was beginning to feel almost unbearably uncomfortable.

"She, ah—doesn't *talk* much about her life, with the harpy of a mother? She's restrained that way? An unselfish person?"

"Oh, she's extremely unselfish." He'd been looking down, during

the last few moments, but now glanced up quickly, suspecting Virgil of mockery. And he read, with the old astuteness, that he was not being mocked, only pitied; that Virgil was merely trying to see how much of the bait he had swallowed.

And in a pinhead's length of time he began to suspect it might be bait, indeed. All that twittering and gushing she did—and himself the unattractive man, so vulnerable.

Half a minute went by then, while he sat in silence, burning, burning.

"Darkness," he muttered at last. "And blood in the stool."

Virgil had literally held his breath, watching him; and now laughed with relief, almost completely reinstating him.

"I couldn't bear her at first."

"No, of course not."

"Benthwick, things are not a ride in the park. Definitely, that's what things are not: a ride in the park."

"Far from it."

"I feel myself disintegrating. For example this absurd business. I have no judgment any more. I can't tell anything true from anything false."

"That bosom would be enough to befuddle anyone, old chap. And it wasn't false."

"And—she gives speeches to clubs, she submits—sad, sad little articles to periodicals. (S is the essence of snake, Benthwick.) And I've even—edited them for her!"

"I'm coming to one conclusion more and more every day: there's probably nothing so contemptible as earning what's known as an honest living. I really mean it. Honor-destroying."

A door opened momentarily on the boardwalk by the bay. A sweet-faced grandmother said to the little boy whose hand she held, "Would you like to go now to that place where we can watch them put the live lobsters into the boiling water?"

It seemed to McNaughton that she was merely underscoring the lesson he'd just learned. He shuddered, uncontrollably. There was a small pill in his pocket; he took it so quickly Virgil didn't notice. "Evil thoughts at dinner. Only ulcers can result," and he washed it down with the last of the wine.

"What would you say to going somewhere else now? A happy frolic on the village green?" Because it would do them both a quantity of good, Virgil thought, to pick up a couple of girls.

McNaughton considered, understanding. Then, reluctantly: "Not tonight. I— I think I may be catching a bit of a sore throat. I— I don't know, I may have been sitting in a draft. I'd better be going home right away, Benthwick. To gargle. I don't want to have a cold. Colds always begin in the throat for me."

Virgil signaled for the check. *Who was this?*

The next morning he slept late. And woke to feel bewildered by the vacation lateness of the hour, by the unaccustomed bed and room, and by himself: last night had left him with the faintest feeling of unreality. Who was he, Virgil Benthwick? What was he doing here? Where had he come from? Why had he come?

He awoke in his mother's old room and could not for a moment imagine why: that she had died, changing by that act her bedroom into a guest room and his old bed-sitting room into what it had been meant to be, a den. Remembering her death at last, and that she was, besides, several years dead, he felt angry, indeed cheated, to have missed her: she had never permitted him to know her at all; everything had always been the Sire.

He accused her now, almost bitterly, of having made a fetish of unimportance.

The only thing he could remember of her that wasn't in some way connected with and overshadowed by the Sire was one hour of a strange Saturday afternoon—the time she'd held him on her lap, after he was grown too big to be held on laps. He let himself revive that scene . . . She had been sitting in her room, this same room, sewing; she had worn a soft blue-flowered dress. He'd come home from boarding school, in no especial mood, and had found her there and had gone to her without a word and had rested his forehead, tentatively, against her upper arm, making it impossible for her to sew. He might have been as much as twelve years old, yet she'd taken his hint without mockery, had put aside the needlework and had drawn him, or let him come, to her lap. She'd stroked his hair

and the back of his neck with warm, tender hands for several minutes, and once or twice she'd kissed the tip of his ear. She'd rocked him very gently on herself, though the chair she sat in was not a rocker. They had not looked at each other: he was years too old for such sweet babying. Whether it was this thought—that he should not have come to her as he'd come and must never come to her so again as long as he lived—or whether it was something else, some child's mood of bitter sadness that had been lying in wait for him for days or months without his knowing it, he could not remember now, but he did remember that tears had come in perfect silence and without the slightest possibility of control. He'd nestled against her for a long time, his face hidden. Neither he nor she had spoken a word, yet at a definite moment he'd known she knew about his tears; and then at another, he knew that she too wept. When at last, his foot had brushed against the floor as they rocked, they were reminded of his new long dignity: her hand had stopped stroking his hair and neck, and he knew that their moment of self-indulgence was over. He had risen quickly and hurried to the bathroom to wash his face. They'd met later in the kitchen; as she served him milk and cookies, they'd talked about usual things: his latest grade in Arithmetic, what news there was from England. They'd talked easily and naturally. Once he'd gestured toward her room and had crisply explained his weakness; "One gets frightfully homesick, sometimes, y'know. Both for England and for this place, too"; but this remark she would not answer. He remembered that she would not answer, quite as well as he remembered her soft blue-flowered dress.

Lying in her bed now, the bed that was no one's, he felt his throat go dry and tight with double longing: to give her back some part of the comfort she'd given him that day, and to be comforted, to know such love again.

Yet surely it had been unreal; was all that not unreal? What had they been crying about?

He felt confused, as if in the chaos of a hangover, but told himself he'd not drunk enough for that the night before.

He rose, showered, dressed. Wandered to the kitchen, made himself toast and eggs.

The Sire sat in the dining room, looking vexed.

The part-time maid had given notice, he said.

Virgil answered nothing, not being in the mood for the Sire.

Nevertheless he was immediately rebuked for the system of democracy. "They've forgotten the pinch of the depression already, her class"; and the Sire went on: not that conditions had actually improved—it was just that every breathing living bit of scum knew now that the Government stood ready to take care, to provide bread and circuses endlessly. The working class could work if it pleased, or work not, as it pleased. Ridiculous. Preposterous. He'd merely told her that to bring out the proper luster of mahogany the human hand should be used, lubrication with natural oil was what was needed, not the friction of a cloth. And she'd quit.

Virgil chortled.

The Sire scowled. "Don't play the clown forever," he advised sourly.

Virgil sobered.

"Take your elbow off the table."

Virgil took his elbow off the table. But was aware of an odd sensation: one really didn't, after all, *have* to take one's elbow off the table.

The Sire handed him a card, on which were written his specifications for a part-time maid. "Telephone the agency today," he said. "This is what I want."

Virgil pocketed the card. But this time there was the conviction of oddness: he might instead have answered quite as easily, "Won't you try looking after yourself for a bit from now on, sir? I'm making a good salary, but I'm in debt. It's quite an expense, don't you see, to keep myself in New York and then this flat for you here as well. Try looking after yourself for a bit, and see how it goes, won't you?"

He rubbed his forehead with the back of his hand and closed his eyes. He fought but was conquered by nostalgia: nostalgia for the old feeling of *having* to obey, of admiring his father to the point of self-obliteration, of being pivoted by a force stronger than himself. There had been some sweet certainty in this place, sweet and secret, and it was gone.

When the Sire rose and went to another room, Virgil saw for perhaps the thousandth time that one of his shoulders was slightly lower than the other, but this fact did not strike him, as it always had before, as a wonderfully thrilling deviation on human anatomy,

contrived by the Sire exclusively for the expression of his own personality, never to be used by anyone else.

He told himself he should not have come home or else should never have gone away.

Finally he admitted the depth: the Sire had become merely a cross old man for him; had somehow lost his invisible cloak of magic, of glory. And, with the Sire no longer the Sire, there seemed singularly little point to things.

He felt increasingly strange.

For a moment or two last night, he'd thought McNaughton mad. One had not thought such things before; McNaughton was McNaughton, not someone mad, the Sire had always been the Sire.

The morning's mail lay on the table. One letter was from Steinmetz Brothers' Cosmetics, Advertising Department. He opened it and read, dully, that he'd been fired.

McNaughton felt he must not go to work, he really could not, not today. But it was his mother's responsibility, certainly, to persuade him to stay home. "Don't be ridiculous," he told her. "I've got to go. How absurd you are, fussing about a cold! I've missed one day already this month. They'll fire me." But, he thought, *that dismal witch wouldn't fire me, not even if I were dying! She'd come and smother me with love, that's all*. Because by now, the morning after Virgil's dreadful thought at Alioto's, he saw it clearly: of course Miss Leckner meant to get him. And he'd recalled that the young man who'd had his place at the library before him—the post of being Iva's assistant—had resigned. And he no longer wondered why.

"I don't know, Marion"; Mrs. McNaughton really didn't know. "Will you be on duty at the desk today?" When he'd nodded: "It's such poor policy, I always feel, to let the patrons think they have been exposed to a cold from a librarian. Poor public relations."

He coughed. "Damn the patrons." Let her work it out.

"Maybe I'd better call Miss Leckner, Marion. And see what she thinks."

"No," he said. "I've got to go. That's all there is to it." And lay still.

They went on at the phone for a long time. They were all sweetness and mutual respect, gentility and cautious wisdom.

His mother returned glowing to the bedside. She fluffed his pillow. Her eyes were shining, "She's a dear girl," she said. She put the thermometer in his mouth again. Miss Leckner wrote learned articles for library publications, she gave lectures for church clubs, she was rather young to be the head of a department, and, besides, when she'd invited them to her lovely home that day, and they'd got to chat with Mrs. Leckner, a charming motherly plump old lady, she couldn't help but notice how Miss Leckner—that day, naturally, they'd called her Iva—seemed to act toward Marion, and of course they did have so many mutual tastes and interests. Besides, what were a few years? Marion had always been older than his age. Then too, to be completely impartial about it, if Miss Leckner were no beauty, she was a fine figure of a woman, and Marion *did* have a limp.

He glared at her, above the thermometer: why didn't she *speak*?

She came down from the clouds; out of the wedding ceremony. "She says you're not to stir. She even suggested—" it was a bit naughty but ever so modern, "that I make you a hot toddy!"

"God damn her," he muttered. "God damn her. 'Now that lilacs are in bloom She has a bowl of lilacs in her room.' Wouldn't she just, though, the crafty buxom cat? She'd even have a bowl of lilacs in her room!"

Mrs. McNaughton hurried off. Apparently it was useless to beg him not to talk like that. And lately he'd even begun swearing.

Robb Nixon walked home slowly, telling himself that what was done was done, what was said was said, and regret was useless.

His shack was about one and a half blocks west of the main highway of Laguna. The land went sloping from the highway to the ocean, and his place clung to the last of the hill. It didn't face the ocean so much as it was on the ocean: during storms, spray from the struggle of water and rocks attacked the exposed pillars of the foundation, and the furious wind howled itself inside so that the lamps trembled and his little butane heater sputtered to keep going,

as if indignant or afraid. There were three rooms, one of them plastered. There was only one door, the back door, and whenever it was slammed too hard, the refrigerator automatically turned itself off and thrust out a little pink lever of a tongue to announce what it had done.

But Robb counted his blessings: he had a skylight, the rent was cheap, and a famous actress had once maintained an auxiliary lover there for several months. Besides, twice a day he whistled for his sea gulls and they crowded hovering around his door to devour every scrap he gave them. In hot weather and low tide he could use the sun-bathers as models without leaving his window, and at other times the surf fishermen, all unobserved. Half a block above stood a grander house, walled in with stone and iron, and above that, fronting on the street, a superb curio shop, splendid enough to overpower snobs and tourists instantaneously; and to Robb their seriousness and security were somehow comforting—he felt they looked down on him like wealthy relatives, sure he was there, but never quite able to see him. The shack was his delight and the envy of everyone who knew him well enough to have been to it.

He'd set no time with Karl as to when they should meet, had said only, "after a while"; and since it wasn't the easiest place in the world to find, he didn't expect him at once. But on leaving the street to descend the hill, Robb saw him squatting there, broad-shouldered yet like a punished child, poking at the damp sand. He must have come at once, despite instructions; stupid, stupid.

The all-appropriate monosyllable requiring no expression, no inflection: "Hi. Hi, Karl."

Immediately he stood—and Robb realized he hadn't told him his name. They shook hands, and Robb saw at once that Karl wasn't surprised at his being an albino: he must have been expecting a man with a long beard, or a monk with sandals and a flowing robe, or God disguised as a friendly mailman. He had been saved; and saviors were notoriously odd. Gratitude radiated from Karl in embarrassingly heavy waves.

But then the house intruded like a tactful friend, offering the diversion of its eccentricities and making it possible to laugh.

Robb built a couple of drinks, apologized for having no cigarettes or ashtrays, and gave permission to use the planked floor as an ash-

tray. They sat on either side of the window, grateful to the ocean.

A sea gull, deceived, thudded against the skylight.

"Those damned birds," Robb complained. "Last year I made the mistake of letting them have my garbage every day, and now whenever they see me come home, they start bashing in the windows until I feed 'em. Will you excuse me while I go into my St. Francis of Assisi act?"

He carried a bag of bread, cereal, bits of green stuff to the beach—he hadn't yet admitted even to himself that he regularly bought more of these things than he could use—and whistled, and was immediately surrounded. Two or three gulls, long confident of him as their personal property, kept trying to perch on his arm while an especially stupid pelican stood ponderously on his shoe; a lone roadrunner kept its wary distance but did cat. On his way back to the house, he had to move carefully so as not to step on the gulls, but their boldness was nothing: what flattered him was that the roadrunner had come at all. Suddenly he remembered McNaughton's description when he'd been there for a feeding, several months ago: "Drolly touching; touchingly droll"; and he felt mildly absurd.

But Karl hadn't been watching. He'd taken the liberty of putting some Gershwin on the record player; and sat listening as though his entire body were nothing but a set of giant ears. And he'd begun using the floor for his ashtray, no longer carefully putting the ashes in his trouser cuff. Noticing these things, Robb felt glad for the first time that he'd invited him.

He remembered what Dorothy had said about his wanting to become a concert pianist; decided he probably hadn't, but couldn't believe he'd turned into an industrialist either.

They were at ease together, more at ease than either had been in a long time. Both patently masculine, they were disturbed neither by desire nor by the need for concealing desire. Gershwin told them man was born nostalgic for something he never had and never could have, and they sat listening, able to bear the pain of what he said for the beauty of his voice.

About the time Robb was expecting to be asked where he'd met Karl, he heard instead: "Will you tell me just one thing—in so many words, straight, Robb? What were you doing there today? I can't get it: you, in a place like that."

Robb laughed, "I'll tell you the truth, but you won't believe it."

"Yes, I will," so seriously.

"I went there because for a long time I've loathed and despised the murals, and I wanted to see if they'd been painted over."

Karl's expression was as disappointed as Robb had expected: obviously, he didn't believe Robb was lying to him, but felt let down that Robb should be capable of lying to himself.

"What did you think of them, the murals?" Robb asked.

"I—didn't pay much attention. I just noticed that they indicated what kind of a place it was."

"That's what I mean: the way they said it. So vilely."

Karl seemed puzzled.

"Didn't you think so?"

"I don't know. It's just more or less understood to be a sign, isn't it, having things about ancient Greeks and Romans around?"

"But these particular ones didn't strike you as—pornographic?" When Karl didn't answer but merely continued to look puzzled, Robb felt the same sort of pessimism that dullness among his students sometimes gave him: if, in the twenty-fifth century after Pericles, the average intelligent sensitive man couldn't begin to read a picture, would he ever be able to? But when he looked at Karl again, he saw that his mouth had turned bitter and his eyes looked brooding, smoldering.

"I'm remembering them now, and I see what you mean. What of it? They're just about right at that, aren't they?"

"That's how it's been for you?"

"That's how it is for everyone. Everyone I've ever seen."

"No. No. God, no."

"It's the only way I ever saw it, and," with increasing swift bitterness, "I'd say it's the only way it ever could be."

"I don't agree, at all. I don't even believe it's the only way you ever saw it."

Karl stared at him in surprise.

"You haven't asked, so I'll tell you where we met. It was at your wedding reception." What he'd expected to happen, happened: Karl muttered, "Christ. At my wedding reception! Then the *next* time you see me—" and obviously much breast-beating was going on. But Robb continued, as if there'd been no interruption: "And I've

an idea that what you felt for him, for your best man, wasn't at all, wasn't anything *like* the murals."

Karl flushed angrily. "You're completely mistaken. There was never anything, *not—the slightest—thing*, between Marc and me!"

"I believe you. Still, that's hardly proof you weren't in love with him."

Annoyed: "How could I have been? I didn't even know anything about it then. Naturally, I knew there was such a thing, but not for —*me!* Anyway, don't say *love*; this rot hasn't anything to do with love."

Quietly: "You're very scornful of yourself. Aren't you?"

They sat perfectly still, throughout the roar and whisper and crash of a dozen waves. Robb, protected, hidden by his large dark glasses, studied the ocean, and he was aware in some way quite apart from vision that Karl's face had reddened and contorted and that his hands clenched and unclenched. When Karl spoke at last, Robb still would not look at him: the voice was too low, too broken.

"So all right, maybe I was always in love with him, then. But I never said so, even to myself, till just this second. I *must* always have been in love with him, and never really in love with Marcia. Marrying her was probably just a substitute, coming as close as I could to him. But—so help me God—I did *not* know it!"

"Take it easy, Karl."

"I can't see what in the name of Christ I'm supposed to do!" His voice was suddenly frantic, husky. "Sometimes, I'm at the point where I just about wish I were dead. I've got to have this thing. I hate it afterwards, but I've got to—"

Robb still would not look at him. "You're divorced?"

"No: we even have a baby. I'm a fine father, I'm a real fine father I am!"

"That doesn't do much good. Whining."

All but shouting: "So what am I supposed to *do*?"

"O.K., now. O.K." He freshened their drinks, and to give Karl time, asked rather painstakingly how many cubes of ice, how much water, and so on. Then, softly, from the kitchen: "D'you still see Marc?"

Very quietly, straining for control: "I'm sorry, excuse me for that

outburst a minute ago. No; Marc's in Alaska. He runs some kind of God damned hunting lodge he bought there."

"Do you imagine it could help to straighten anything out if you were to separate from Marcia for a while, and go up there to—see him?"

Mocking: "Go to 'see' him! He'd kill me. He's a delicate sort of guy, or, I mean slight—but he'd get a gun and kill me. Marc's a man."

"Thanks. That must be an enviable condition." When Karl started to apologize, Robb waved him down. "What about the baby? How important is the baby to your life?"

"Oh, Jesus. The baby is a little fat thing in pink blankets. And he smiles, and that's fine, and he drools all over himself, but he'll reach out for your hand, very cute, and then the next thing he's messing his diapers. I don't know. All I can see: he's a little fat thing in pink blankets."

"What about Marcia, then? Is she happy?"

"Lord, yes! Sickeningly happy! She thinks I'm grouchy sometimes, but she really likes that; it makes her feel wifely. She'd never believe it, about the other. So far as sex is concerned, and parents-in-law and money and all that, we get along fine. What I can't stand are things I could never mention: like smearing lipstick on me when she kisses me, and hanging her stockings in the bathroom; I can't bear her voice any more, or most of the things she talks about. And it's all I can do just to be in the same room with her when she's menstruating; and when she used to nurse the baby, sometimes it made me sick to my stomach. There's nothing wrong with Marcia—she's wonderful, really. But if her slip ever shows, or if she takes her shoes off in a theater because they're too tight, or does anything like that, I don't feel just annoyed, I think I can't endure it! Sometimes I think I'll go nuts and hit her, or something!"

"Maybe you should ask for a divorce, Karl. Before you—do explode."

"No. No. Because if I were divorced, then this would become my whole life. The Dumas sort of thing."

"I keep coming back to that: you've never seen people there you wouldn't be ashamed of being? Because I have. Not many, but some.

People permanently together, not casual about it. One even sees a fairly high type of woman, sometimes—”

“You’re the first human being I’ve ever seen involved in this mess, Robb. All the women I see are sexless braying donkeys. And the men wear eyeshadow and giggle over ‘I’m in Love with a Wonderful Guy.’”

Impatiently, the last resort: “Well then, what about getting psychiatric help?”

Karl laughed. “I went to one. I said I didn’t want all that guff of being analyzed. I just wanted to know: what did he think of the subject? Not me, just the subject. And *he* said—now get this, because it’s unbelievable: *he* said, Once the biological necessity of reproduction is satisfied, there wasn’t any reason your ‘emotional erotic attachment’ couldn’t be formed with someone of the same sex as well as with someone of the opposite sex! He went on and on for a while first, you know, about how complex our species is, and all that. But anyway, then I felt great—for days. Then one day he telephoned me.”

“He—? Oh.”

“Yeah. Said he had a new Tschaiowsky recording he thought I might enjoy. I told him if I ever saw him around I’d smash his stupid nose, glasses or no glasses.”

“Why so belligerent? If he really did believe the way he said he believed—”

“You think it’s all right for a psychiatrist to be like that?”

“No, of course not. I think only thieves and pickpockets and dope addicts and madams should be like that. Karl—you *want* the murals to be right; don’t you?”

“No! I— Why, God damn it, what—”

But Karl’s earnest protest was interrupted by a quick knocking at the door.

When Virgil knocked at Abraham’s apartment door, he felt disappointed to be answered by a stranger: a tiny, timid, overly subservient Jew, obviously—his accent was so unintelligible—a recent German refugee. As he was coming by appointment, Virgil had more

or less expected to be greeted either by Vanya or by Abraham himself. After all, it had been two years.

He gave his name, entered, deposited on an end table the bottle of Scotch he'd brought, and sat down to wait for them; and advised himself not to be so sensitive.

Then something about the atmosphere of the place seemed wrong, or at least different. He went to stand by the window. In a moment, the feeling that had troubled him several times during the last few days settled on him again: some bewilderment, or strangeness, or unreality. The apartment did not feel the same; it seemed possessed by dark shades; it felt to him as if some sort of mold hadn't been sufficiently aired out. Deliberately he stroked the weave of his suit, at the sleeve: was reassured by the cool, hard, clean substantiality of it. An inner door opened and Abraham wheeled himself into the room briskly, decisively. "Virgil: it is a great pleasure to see you!"

"Abraham!" Virgil stepped toward him, with the mad idea that if he were to lift him up, put him on his feet, he would never need the wheel chair again. "What is this?" And, begging hope: "This is temporary?"

"No, Virgil, it is not temporary. I am sorry to be—shocking to you. And I know that I should have written to you some time ago about it. Or should at least have told you on the phone yesterday when you called. Forgive me, will you? I lacked the courage." Smiling, "Though I came very *near* to having enough."

"What— When did this—"

"About nine months ago. An automobile accident. And I should prefer not to discuss it, you can understand? There has been a series of operations; very expensive and very unsuccessful. But I get about fine. Look." And he demonstrated how easily he could turn, speed up, slow down, and stop abruptly. When Virgil murmured that he was very adept, he nodded, pleased, "And business thrives for me, too. Come, you must please sit down. Good, now what have you brought us here?— Scotch! And most excellent Scotch!" He rang a little bell attached to his chair, and when his servant came, ordered glasses and ice. "Virgil, what a pleasure to see you! I enjoyed your letters so much, but it is nothing like this: to see you!"

As Abraham poured their drinks, Virgil tried to match his casualness. He placed a tiny package on an end table, remarking, "Here's a

little nothing for Vanya. One of those charm bracelets, to jangle you to distraction with."

"She will be very pleased. She has become a great jangler. Night and day, because they wear them to bed too, you know, as many as the arm can hold. For a high school girl not to jangle now would mean she must be dead. I often wonder how the teachers can make themselves heard in a roomful of jangling. We should—it is true—pay them more."

Virgil smiled. "But it wouldn't be any great trial to be Vanya's teacher. If one could just stay ahead."

An expression of pain flickered over Abraham's face. "Yes. Her I.Q. was impressive, and no one ever succeeded in dulling her curiosity."

They were quiet for a bit; then both started to speak at once. Abraham insisted Virgil have the floor.

"Where is she tonight, Abraham?"

"She is—at a party. B'nai B'rith. Dancing, and so on."

"She won't be back till late? Or, will I be able to see her?"

"She is staying out—the night. A sleeping party. The hostess is a friend of mine."

"Well, I'll make sure I see her some time before I go back. I'm curious to see what adolescence has done to her. Or rather, what she's doing to adolescence."

Again, a flickering of distress crossed Abraham's face. "When will you be going back, Virgil?"

About to answer, Virgil paused, amused at himself. "Come to think of it, maybe I shan't go back at all: the postman brought me news this morning that I've been fired."

"Fi— No, Virgil!"

"Yes. Tumbled out on my little pink ear. Terribly tragic, except that it isn't."

"Why? Why, Virgil?" Abraham's voice was almost tender with sympathy. "Why were you?"

"The letter charged inefficiency. Imagine that: inefficiency! For the most abominable, humiliating sort of hack work in the world!" Then he told Abraham the real reason: that he'd been fool enough to carry on an affair with Mrs. Steinmetz.

"Yes: foolish. But—Joseph of Egypt showed more character, yet it was a pity what happened to him."

"But it was I who started the affair. I persuaded *her*!"

Abraham smiled. "Virgil, excuse me; I am older: that part is so often a matter of illusion."

Again they were quiet for a moment, while Virgil smarted, realizing for the first time that of course it had been Mrs. Steinmetz who'd made the decision, probably even as they were being introduced.

"You never wrote much about your work, what it was you did there, exactly. Tell me about it."

"Please, no, Abraham," Virgil pushed it away. "It was too frightful. Cater to me instead: let's discuss your portrait. You know: the great masterpiece I did of you." He smiled, remembering the pleasure of executing it. The idea for the work had struck him about a year ago: to copy one of Rembrandt's Jews, on permanent display in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, but to do the face as if it were Abraham's, with head tilted the way Abraham sometimes tilted his, with the ambiguous surface smile Abraham had, and the burning eyes; yet dressed in seventeenth century black, and hatted, and still with the great Dutch ring conspicuous. A tremendously exciting experiment, and quite successful.

Abraham shook his head; his eyes were glowing; for the first moment of the evening, he seemed fully himself, alive, real. "How I loved that painting! Today, you do not see it here because it is—being reframed. But, always it is hanging just—" and he pointed out a bare space on the wall. "What a painting! Would you believe this—please believe me—several of my friends, seeing it, thought: a genuine Rembrandt!"

Virgil laughed. "They musn't have known much, then. I mean, aside from everything else, the canvas and the paints are all obviously twentieth century. How'd you have it framed?"

"Contemporary."

"Oh, contemporary. Well then, at first glance, possibly—" The flattery of having been mistaken for Rembrandt, even by ignoramuses, tingled electrifyingly in his chest, and he couldn't resist the thought: *I wonder how it would have looked with a little aging?*

Abraham chuckled. "That does not annoy you, eh?"

Virgil flushed, grimaced. "I suppose my poor old ego must be pretty desperate to latch on to something: it hasn't been exactly gratified for a long time, you know, belonging to a huckster for cosmetics!"

"Is that how you think of yourself?"

"Yes, or sometimes as a sort of impersonal gigolo: Please the ladies, flatter the ladies! Don't startle the ladies, don't distract the ladies, don't disturb or enlighten them; just *please* the ladies! And somehow it was worse because it was so easy for me. Damn what the letter said: I was *horribly* good at it!"

"Then at least it will not be difficult for you, to find some other place?"

"No, I suppose not terribly. But I'll not find anything that paid what Steinmetz Brothers paid, that's certain. They were at the top of it, for money."

"If perhaps they would not recommend you, will it be hard to prove you did the work you did? Have you some portfolio?"

Virgil shook his head. "Not a thing. What I left in my desk would be theirs, I imagine, by law. But in any case, I can prove myself quickly enough. I know the wretched field pretty well by now, and I can be like an experienced whore, I suppose: adjusting myself to every demand."

Sadly: "You really feel so strongly, so bitterly?"

Virgil looked at him squarely. "I absolutely loathe this kind of work. D'you know they come right out and say they want *nothing* but the 'tried and true'? And they go so far as to *explain*, at the meetings, that when they say 'tried' they mean 'tritel'."

Abraham chuckled. "'Tripe' is perhaps what they really mean."

"Precisely. They say in ten years they expect to go on to Mondrian. They think his irritation factor won't be too great then. It's too 'antagonistic' now. Dali's *just now* safe! Renoir, yes, Renoir like mad! (God, how I've come to despise Renoir these last two years!) Matisse, they say not yet!"

"These—are the people you—take inspiration from, you mean?"

"Oh, Abraham! Come off it! These are the people we *steal* from! And, at that, like with Renoir: only *his* commercial things anyway, his ladies on chocolate boxes!"

"Virgil—" Hesitantly, "So how is it with you, now? The money situation? You were able to save, in New York? I should not ask?"

"I don't mind your asking. No, I've saved nothing. It's odd: it doesn't seem to me I'm extravagant, but—whenever it's impossible to live at least a little like a gentleman, I simply feel I'm *not* a gentleman." He helped himself to a drop more Scotch. "And ac-

tually, Abraham, if one *isn't* to be a gentleman, I can't help seeing it would be far better to be dead. Am I being absurd?"

"You have described him so often: I would say only that you are being the son of your father."

"Yes, yes, that's *it!* D'you know it: you've hit it exactly! But lately—you'll think me mad—it's almost as if I've *become* my father!"

"This happens always, but usually not until after a son is born."

"I mean something different. He—I can't say this easily—always seemed to despise me, I never knew why; but I think it made me idolize him the more. And now, all that's unimportant; he's unimportant, suddenly. For it's I who despise me."

"Just for this? Just for your way of making an honest living?"

Virgil sat silent, confused by himself. "To be ruled by the world's definition of honesty, when it is not honest—indeed, very *dishonest*—to yourself, strikes me as indescribably cringing and contemptible." He rose restlessly. "I'd no idea of being such a dull green-turtle-soup bore tonight."

"Sit down." But when Virgil continued standing: "Please, Virgil. I have something to tell you. Many things, perhaps. Sit down." He freshened their glasses, adding ice. "I lied to you. Your painting is not being reframed. It is on loan, to a very rich man who begs me to sell it to him. A Jew. I explain: this is *not* a Rembrandt; but he is in love with that painting, he will pay me a Rembrandt price for it. And I have told him: it is not for sale."

"Great God, don't be a fool! Sell it, Abraham!"

"If I sell it, I will not give you the money."

Stunned: "I didn't ask for the blighted money."

"Because it is mine and I love it. And if I am going to be deprived of it, of looking at it, that money is going to—to the places the extra money goes. But listen, Virgil: perhaps you would do a portrait for him? Something like that, the seventeenth century idea, but his face? I tell you he is mad to have it. And he will pay you handsomely."

"I don't know. I suppose I could take a fling at it."

Then they fell into their longest silence.

Abraham's expression seemed almost grief-stricken at last. Virgil watched him uneasily. Attempts at small talk glowed briefly, spasmodically, between them. But whenever Virgil made a move to leave, Abraham prevented him.

Then the great hurt came out with a burst. "I have to tell you: Vanya is dead. When there was the accident. I pretend sometimes she is alive."

"Oh, God! Abraham, Abraham, oh my God!"

Calmly, even distantly: "We had gone to see an old family friend just escaped from Germany—and he took me aside during the evening and told me he had seen my sister die there, one month before. I knew it would happen, it was no surprise to me. But not the details, the Nazi details. She had been an agitator, and— He was a little out of his mind, and did not stop to ask himself what point there would be, to tell me the details. So after a few minutes, I said to Vanya, 'We must go home,' and then I was thinking sometime I had to tell her her mother was dead. I suppose I thought the car would drive itself."

Virgil groaned something inarticulate.

"We were speaking of honesty, a little while ago, you and I?"

"Oh, Abraham!"

"In these last few months I have become someone else again, changed almost entirely. I have no use for the honesty the world honors. Or it is unimportant, in my conscience. I think: shall one more woman die the way my sister died, if I can give the money to get her out? If honesty then is still a virtue, in comparison, it must be—I think, small. Virgil?"

Virgil stepped over to him, placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Since that night I woke in the hospital, in my own conscience anyway there is no pretense of honesty: I provide by now for a whole carload of refugees. I have sent fortunes in bribes to officials in Sweden, to help smuggle them; a good avenue, through Sweden. And I—" His voice broke. "Now this is what I must tell you, because you have been my friend for a long time. Do you remember the Degas pastiche? And do you remember I said no, that I would *not* have sold it to you?"

"Please, please—"

"Yes. You guess what I will say. That I have become very daring, unscrupulous. Without honor."

"You suggest you'd sell it me now?"

"Suggest? I make it very clear."

After a moment's thought: "I can't believe you, Abraham. Not really. Because you obviously trust me, and if you were without honor, totally, you wouldn't be able to feel trust for anyone."

With an impatient gesture: "You reason like a schoolboy. I trust you and would trust you, to the death. Not because of what I am or am not, but because I know you could not betray a friend. Years ago, I took a minor chance on you once—"

"Minor?"

"Minor: after all, what did I tell you that day that you could prove? But I take no chance today, I know you very well. Virgil Benthwick could steal, or lie, or make his money—like an 'experienced whore,' but he could not betray a friend. Not and live with himself after. It is his limitation."

Silent, Virgil felt the definition enclose him. He bore it with little sensation: it fitted. "Yet every word of that could be applied to yourself just as well, my—friend."

"So. *Still* you think that?" Suddenly Abraham's eyes were glittering with tears. He shook his head. "Friendship is to me a luxury now. And luxury must always be a—*second* thing. You understand, Virgil?"

Looking away from him quickly, Virgil happened to glance at the little package he'd brought Vanya. He saw her sweep in, brave as a flash of color; she was wearing high heels for perhaps the second or third time, and was elated from the party, and abundantly supplied with life. She was coming to kiss him, before she was not there.

When Robb answered the door to her, Betty came in quickly and kissed him on the cheek. "Hi, sibling. I wish to God you'd get yourself a telephone."

"Poverty prevents. Betty, this is Karl—ah—"

"Nordtgaard."

"Nordtgaard. And, Karl, my sister Mrs. Trotter."

Rising politely, smiling handsomely: "How do you do?"

Favorably impressed, immediately and glandularly: "How do you do? I'm sorry to come bursting in like this, Robb, but," turning to Karl, "if he won't get a phone, what's to be done?"

"You're not bursting in," Robb assured her. "Sit down. What would you like to drink, and what brings you down this way?"

"I'd like a glass of ice water, first. And then whatever you're having. And I'm here because Mother Trotter invited us to spend a few days with them at their place in La Jolla."

"So on the way down you thought you'd stop off and kindly see your dear old brother?"

"Kindly of. And Trot's in the curio place," she gestured toward the top of the hill. "He'll be here in a moment. And all he'll want is ice water."

"Fine." Robb went to prepare the three glasses. From the kitchen, "Where's my nephew?"

"With Mother, thank God. I adore him," she explained to Karl, "but he's such an animal!"

"Her son's a little on the hearty side," Robb backed her up, and was about to add, "He exhausts them both," when he saw they'd begun talking together. About the view, or the shack, or the gulls; but together.

Betty was dressed with the expensive casualness she wore so cleverly. The old kittenishness was pretty well gone: she had become sharper, more sophisticated. She'd retained her looks, her figure was still neat and her face piquant. She'd come to terms with herself, at twenty-eight: knew what she could have and what she'd missed. She spent her husband's salary and was agreeable to him; loved her son and took care not to spoil him; longed for a man, and felt lucky to have had one for the while she'd had. She was a faithful wife; but Karl must be about five years her junior: she flirted with him dexterously, with a sort of automatic efficiency. Yet nonsalaciously; chiefly just as an exercise to keep her distance from the thirties.

And as Robb watched Karl respond to her, he felt positive that Karl had presented Marcia truly: Karl's wife would be in love with him, she would be satisfied.

When she saw him bring the tray from the kitchen, Betty turned, politely including him: "Thanks, Robb." And as if reading his thoughts, inquired: "How's Dorothy these days?"

"Fine. She's fine."

"I'm glad. You've seen her lately?"

"Yes, indeed; we had dinner at the Victor Hugo just last week." He added silently, by a glance: *And, if you're worried we might be breaking up, don't bother. She stayed the night.*

"Dorothy's such a really grand person," Betty told Karl. "D'you know her, by any chance, Dorothy Rossitier?"

"No, dear, he doesn't. But his wife does. She used to be one of Dorothy's star pupils."

Karl, you're married! You betray me, slightly, by being married so young. "Let me mooch a cigarette, will you? Trot has ours, and this brother of mine's too pure to smoke."

"Certainly. Sorry."

And she managed it so properly—lifted her face just so, closed one eye against the flame; and tilted her pretty little bosom forward provocatively, yet so properly. *Besides, your wife being my possible-future-sister-in-law's pupil rather dates me. So now you simply must find me desirable.*

Robb realized before she did that she'd overplayed her hand: Karl retreated.

Then Mr. Trotter arrived. He had become extremely married. Even the way he took off his glasses and huffed on them and polished them with an immaculate handkerchief was decidedly married. He said, "How do you do?" with a slightly old-fashioned gravity; he was still head of a fine department store's personnel section, but he would go no further.

Betty, wanting to correct his middle-aged propriety, asked, "Well, did you get out unscathed, Trot? Nobody tried to rape you?"

"Betty!" But then, because he knew that otherwise she'd tease him later for stuffiness: "As a matter of fact, nobody even asked me for a date!"

Betty laughed, her eyes bright as a child's with mischief. "Two interior decorators—oh, the *sweetest* boys—came into the curio shop, and really, I had to leave. I couldn't control myself: they were simply *hilarious!*"

"Oh?" Robb asked Trotter. "What did they do?"

"Well, Betty and I were just looking around for a little thank-you gift to take to Mother, you know, when this pair came in. Apparently they're working on a house together, for some Mrs. Dondlinger, who

must be at least a millionaire, and—" he broke off, not quite embarrassed. "You tell them, dear. I never can get it through my head it's all right to talk about it!"

So Betty told them, imitating the interior decorators very cleverly indeed, inflections and gestures accurately captured. "Oh, I think you're just being too really *gigantically* stubborn, Wally! In your *heart* you know that carpet just *cries* for taupe! It does! It absolutely begs and cries for taupe! And Mrs. Dondlinger herself told me she wanted—" 'Now my dear Ruggie, who on earth *cares* what Mrs. Dondlinger wants? The poor creature *admits* she doesn't know a *thing*! And it's too ridiculous about you: lately you'd hear everything *visible* crying for taupe, if I didn't stop you; it's become simply obsessive!' "That's not so, Wally! You want everything to be the way *you* see it, all the time, and it's just not *fair*! Last month I let you clutter up that perfectly yummy rumpus room with all those deadly dreadful teals, and I never said a *word*, but if now you're suddenly going to get a fever against *taupe*—" "

Everyone laughed when she finished, and only her husband had flushed.

Karl told a joke concerning an old Irish farmer who'd won the sweepstakes and had floundered into the world of architects and decorators; told it perfectly, with a brogue as authentic as a shamrock—cultivated, Robb decided, to match his looks. And, in Karl's story, all interior decorators were supposed to be of a fraternity with Betty's. And, by his tone, they were cast just beyond the last frontier of humanity.

Again everyone laughed, this time only Robb with difficulty.

Then Trotter stated seriously that it seemed to him people viewed this sort of thing too lightly nowadays. It was appalling how much there seemed to be of it lately. Not that he meant to be puritanical, not that; but it was a disease, and ought to be recognized as such, really not just laughed at. Karl and Betty agreed with him, and someone said something about the decadence of ancient Rome: a sign of the times, imminent disaster, and so on. Robb wandered restlessly to his worktable. He had played this sort of game a thousand times, he told himself, knew he could play it perfectly at any moment; but it seemed unnecessary now: Karl was taking care of it so skillfully for him. He sat on the table, pawed aimlessly through papers. He realized

he was hungry, waited for a pause in the conversation to ask if anyone would like to have a sandwich with him.

"It's the parents' fault," Betty said, "don't you think? There was an article in—" She'd read an article, and she believed it: the cause was dominating mothers. Robb asked: Did she think it could ever be congenital? No, she didn't think it could ever be congenital. Because, if it were, it could be cured like any other glandular disturbance. It was dominating mothers.

Mr. Trotter polished his glasses. "It's really a distasteful subject. I think we've dwelt on it long enough." *Betty, you overdo things. Maybe I am a little old-fashioned, but you do overdo things.*

"Oh, you're so prudish, Trot. This is the only way problems are ever solved."

"Stop being so dominating, Betty," Robb ordered. "I'm hungry, Karl's hungry, Trot's hungry. Quick about it: go into the kitchen and make us all some sandwiches or something. Go on: be a woman."

She ignored him. "I mean, there's no use hiding our heads in the sand."

Robb, with mock sadness: "Trot, I fear for the little one sometimes, my only nephew. You see how she overrides us?"

Trotter seized the opportunity to command; it was only when some other man was around that he dared. He went to Betty, tugged her gently to her feet, told her for once she must obey, Robb was right. Karl, instantly become a convincing Irish cop, joined the bullying, and in a moment all three of them were pushing her into the kitchen. They tied a dishtowel around her for an apron, Robb calling it a proper symbol of submission. She protested with pretty outrage, though she'd clearly surrendered at Karl's first word.

Loftily closing the kitchen door on her, they returned to the living room, Robb to his worktable, again to riffle aimlessly through stacks of drawings, papers, sketches; Karl and Trotter to discuss what might result from the Stalin-Hitler pact.

When Robb's hands fell on the pastel he'd tried of Terrence several months ago, and, next to it, a self-portrait Terrence had done in charcoal, he felt astonished at himself: saw certainly he'd not been pawing about pointlessly, but had been wanting these, needing the reassurance of Terrence's face, its perfection. He kept them out and searched deliberately until he found a profile sketch, and then a

miniature in oils. He studied all four intently throughout a couple of minutes, until the old expected calmness—the certainty that at least for him his love was real—bore in on him.

"Karl," he said at the first pause in the political conversation, "come here for a minute and take a look at these, will you?" He explained to his brother-in-law, "We were discussing some daubs a couple of hours ago, and I was trying to show him what was wrong with them." When Karl came to stand beside him, he continued, confident of their remaining undisturbed—Trotter's interest in art being nonexistent—"If you'll contrast the serenity here, the natural simplicity or 'rightness' here—against that poor stuff we were talking about, all that tortured jaded artificiality and viciousness, I'm sure you'll see what I meant, Karl. There's a kind of innocence here that is unshatterable, do you see it? As abstract beauty, one thing; as reflection of inner truth something else, something permanently—I mean for all my life—intoxicating to me."

Karl held the pictures silently, his expression grave.

"Art depends for its value on some interpretation of life, you agree?" Robb asked Trotter professionally, to make sure of his boredom. "And that was the point," he said, leaving the table, and going to sit by him, "that Karl and I were talking about earlier. I was trying to show that a particular work was false in intent, because its observation point was not only hellishly inadequate but deliberately dishonest—dishonest in its implication that there could be no other observation point."

Trotter cleared his throat. "I often envy you for being so interested in your work, Robb. What—What line are you in, Karl?"

"I play the piano," Karl muttered, still absorbed. "In hotels, night clubs, so on." His voice seemed almost drugged. "This is what's known as my settling-down period." At last he put the pictures aside, stared at Robb strangely. "You've—persuaded me, I think; you, and this afternoon. Or nearly, at any rate."

"If you'll excuse the cliché we tell our students: I merely open the windows, it's up to you to breathe the air."

Trotter laughed heartily. "I remember that line from my college days. It's a good one, Robb: it awed me plenty. But I almost breathed myself into changing from a Bus. Ed. Major to a Philosophy Major once, on account of it; and I think," again he laughed heartily, "that

might have gotten a little drafty!" He coughed apologetically when he saw that neither of them had been listening.

They were very hearty when they met by appointment in Mr. Morley's library, almost as if they were both not congenitally alien to heartiness.

They shook hands very hard and spoke in voices rich with cordiality: Terrence felt he should make it plain that he'd forgiven Virgil for always having awed him so hugely years before, and Virgil felt apologetic for his custom of having looked down on Terrence so openly—but, after all, only for being such a baby.

It was a cardinal rule of Terrence's not to drink during daylight hours (you never knew how much you might be losing with drinks—what ideas and what lights, what shades and what shapes; for example, everyone knew what it did to reds and browns, but once, after martinis at lunch, he'd made a wall go soft and a window almost melt, and he was simply not a soft wall man); but he hospitably offered Virgil the bar. Yet when Virgil refused to budge from his not-unless-you-join-me stand, Terrence was gracious enough to make the sacrifice: "After all, I guess I'd better: I haven't seen you in a long time."

"Quit. Should help a lot."

About two seconds later, Terrence looked up sharply, and saw that yes, he was being teased again; he flushed, ever so slightly, and grinned, admitting defeat. But at least he'd learned not to say, "Oh, I didn't mean it that way," and both of them were glad for that much.

The drink he proposed making was his favorite and he grew enthusiastic assuring Virgil how much he'd liked it. "Sometimes I make one for Mr. Morley, you know, for his weight. Must be around a hundred calories in it."

Virgil raised the estimate to a thousand, as he watched it being made: equal parts of heavy cream, gin, and crème de cacao shaken together, over shaved ice. It wasn't at all the sort of drink he cared for, yet he thought it almost touching, indeed close to charming that Terrence should revel in it: there'd never be a hope of changing him,

he'd be as long as he lived the little boy who'd not been bought the ice cream cones, who'd not been given the pink cotton candy. He hid his mouth behind the glass and pronounced the drink delicious.

As his gaze was about to leave Terrence to travel over the rich room—as the years went by, enjoyment of such richness was absolutely necessary to him periodically—he was arrested by a discovery: Terrence had not become what everyone had supposed he would, merely too good-looking or delicately pretty. He'd become as handsome, as perfectly and strongly handsome as a marble Greek. Virgil acknowledged it: it was astonishing that anyone could be so perfect.

He stared at him for several moments (Terrence, busy with his drink, noticed nothing), stared with oddly twisted feelings, one of which, unaccountably, seemed close to anger. "What are you—doing?" he mumbled, not as one would ask a person, but rather as some fantastic phenomenon might be addressed.

Terrence started; his face went humbly inquiring, nakedly diffident.

Then Virgil felt shocked to have been so crude. He could not believe he'd slipped away from himself so entirely even for an instant. He'd meant: *What are you doing here? What's your position? Are you a paid companion, or a glamorized valet-nurse-butler, or what? Besides, don't you realize it's indecent for anyone to be so extravagant with beauty? Two thousand years ago, yes; four hundred years ago, yes; but not today. Nothing's made by hand today.* But if he couldn't account for his confusion, he hid it very well, and lied with composure, "I meant what are you doing now, in your work?"

"Oh. Oh, in my work." And it simply wouldn't go, Terrence saw; he could never get the upper hand with Virgil, or even be on an equal basis with him. "I've been doing—" He'd been experimenting with primitives, but for some reason couldn't bear to say it. "—still lifes," he said. He told himself he was only three years younger than Virgil; there was no reason to act such a fool. He picked at a gold shining thread on the arm of the chair. *What was a primitive, anyway? You either were a primitive or you weren't; you didn't do primitives, the way he'd been saying lately.* "What are you doing?" he got out. *What the hell are you doing that's so much?* He wished he were upstairs painting, or else that Robb were with them. Robb would know how to handle the conversation, would know how to make him seem—like somebody, somehow.

"I—" Virgil had to smile. Something about Terrence had always made them smile, both McNaughton and himself, and sometimes Robb and Johnny as well—George alone having been rude enough to laugh. He spoke kindly, tolerantly, in a voice for Terrence, not for the words: "I've just been fired from my job. I'm a down-and-outer."

Terrence gasped, looked up completely startled. "You've been fired? You've been—"

Then Virgil almost loved him: his expression was as shocked as that of a child just told no, his father *couldn't* lift the piano.

"But my God, I always thought— I mean you were always— In all those critiques at U.C., they always kept saying you were the most technically advanc— Well—*Jeez!* What happened?"

Virgil settled deeper into his chair. He was enjoying the moment hugely. Whatever he told Terrence would be believed: a big bad Advertising Director had made indecent advances to him and had been furious when spurned, the President of the Company had been advised by his numerologist to dismiss all personnel whose names contained the letter V, or he'd sent his shirts too long to the wrong laundry, one that didn't use Rinso. He replied with what seemed the greatest possibly irony: "They thought I was too imitative."

Terrence considered this solemnly. At last he murmured, "Yes, that was your only fault."

The moments went on in silence.

Virgil felt he'd been hurt by something as stupid and brutal as a door walked into, something quite incontestably correct and violent: a glass-spiked fence. He thought of telling the truth, that he'd been fired because the boss couldn't bear being cuckolded by an employe, not for any other reason. But at the next moment he realized, excruciatingly, that even if he were believed, even if Terrence flushed for having made an ass of himself again, for having failed to understand a joke again, nothing essential would be altered. The words had been spoken and would hang on endlessly before him, not rotting in time, but, for his life, imperishable. Suddenly he plunged into the scalding truth of admitting what the Sire had implied years before and McNaughton had denied: being imitative was not his only fault, it was his only strength.

The sweet drink tasted suddenly cloying, impossible. He went to the shelves and pretended to look at the titles of books. If a moth

had come from hiding, blind, for him to catch, to crush in his hand, and if the moth had been himself, he would certainly have destroyed it. "Oh?" he murmured, easily, lightly, "so *that* was my trouble, eh?"

And Terrence knew, as soon as he saw him stand, that he'd erred heavily. But what to do? He wished more than ever he were painting. "That was asinine. I'm an idiot. Sorry." He finished the rest of his drink, went to make some more. In the pinch of desperation, he found a sentence full of words—and, as soon as he'd got those out, a jumbled paragraph more: "Look, Benthwick, don't let a thing like that throw you. You know: don't let it throw you. Y'know, I'm awfully glad you came today; I thought—since we're neither of us such great letter writers—well, I mean I didn't think you'd crossed me off your list, or anything, but really when you called I was delighted; I thought maybe you'd gotten beyond even remembering me, us, all of us. You know a thing that worries me sometimes, is what the devil I'm going to do. I mean, Mr. Morley's not going to live forever, he's going to leave me a thousand dollars when he dies, but I mean after—" But between one breath and another he found himself hating Virgil for having taken him from his work and his care of Mr. Morley, hating himself for being such an incompetent fool, and hating even the glasses and the ice and the ingredients he mixed, and despising, to the point of misery, what part of him it was that had actually lent voice to the thought that God, Mr. Morley himself, could ever possibly die.

His wretchedness got through—somehow it was a thing crashingly audible—to Virgil; yet not as the wretchedness of a person, for it seemed to him only a child's discomfort. Strong again, the adult again, all in control, Virgil turned from the shelves. "Oh? It's like that? Well, perhaps I should be the one to tell *you* not to worry, Collin. Haven't we both of us enough— I think you were trying to say 'technical ease' or 'dexterity' or 'manual proficiency' or some such thing a while ago— In other words, are you really seriously concerned? If this particular sinecure should end, wouldn't there almost automatically be another turning up? Some fairly comfortable way for you to earn—or be granted—your bread?" He stopped, not sure how much malice he had let show through despite the almost excessive mildness of his voice, not sure why he should feel the longing

to hurt at all, and rather frightened of himself for the momentary cruelty.

By now the fresh drinks were iced and shaken. Terrence poured. He remembered how it used to terrify him that well bred, well educated people could be cruel without being angry; the first few times he'd seen it, he'd thought them drunk or mad. He'd worried: if someone could come into a room, looking as calm as a doughnut, and gently say something intended to annihilate you, and then settle down serenely to read *The New Yorker*, how were you ever to protect yourself? When his father had been angry, there'd been shouting for a warning: you could get out; even if he caught you, you still might dodge some of the blows or shield your head. But in the upper classes you were never warned, you were never given a chance to protect yourself at all. The solution had occurred to him one day while he was painting tomatoes bedded in snow, and considering, so far as he knew, nothing in the world except color and texture: if a fist broke your nose, there was nothing to do about it except suffer, but if someone's tongue went mean, the result was entirely up to you: you could either feel the hurt or not, it was your choice. He chose to smile at Virgil, that disarming radiant smile he'd finally learned he had, and he answered genially, "You mean you think I'll always make out somehow, Benthwick? Muddle through like the stout-hearted limeys, and all that?"

But if Virgil had been frightened of himself for being cruel, he felt enraged to see his cruelty ignored. Taking the refilled glass Terrence offered, he nodded thanks and murmured, very quietly, smiling too, "Certainly. Heaven protecting the poor working girl, and all that."

For the first time it didn't go, it wasn't true: Terrence found it not a matter of choice after all. The hurt he felt was enough, for a moment, to amount to paralysis.

Virgil turned again to the shelves, drew out a volume of Aubrey Beardsley's pen sketches, chanced to open to Salome gowned in blackest black and exquisitely admiring her Baptist's head. He loved the thing: how its masses were emphasized, contrasted against the single delicate line; he remembered he'd loved it since childhood, when the Sire had first shown it him. For the moment he forgot Terrence completely, as well as himself and the entire room. Then

recalling who he was and what he'd said—and to *Terrence* whom they'd always protected, *Terrence* the bricklayer's son, whose childhood had been so far from including *Beardsley*! he felt embarrassment creep over him like animated slime. Even if the implication of his remark were true (he felt sure it wasn't), how utterly tasteless it had been, like some righteous biddy of a clerk wanting to know if you were married before she'd sell you contraceptives! "Collin," he said, "look here, I'm awfully sorry, that came out sounding rather otherwise, you know. Collin?"

"Thanks for coming, Benthwick." And he gave him quite a decent Mr. Morley stare.

There was no imagining anything else, *Virgil* saw; he'd been dismissed. By *Terrence*! Not too quickly, he took a swallow from his drink, put the glass on a table. "Collin, don't be a dead horse. Really, you're being hypersensitive. I said I'm sorry. You know perfectly well I didn't mean it to come out sounding like that. Besides, I'd like to say how-d'you-do to Mr. Morley, now that I'm here—*Terrence*?"

It took a moment for *Terrence* to decide what someone like *Robb* would do under the circumstances; then he yielded, still hurt but no longer angry, "I didn't *think* it sounded like you. O.K., I'll run up and see how he's feeling. He may not be up to seeing anyone, though. I can't help that, of course." Leaving, he did almost run, and not entirely because of wanting to get away: it was just that he'd remained as much a runner as a walker.

But the door hadn't quite closed behind him when the telephone on the table began calling. He returned to answer it.

His voice came out startled. "*Johnny*? You mean *Johnny Rue*?" His eyes sought *Virgil*'s in amazement, almost consternation. They listened to *Johnny* together, *Virgil* reading what was being said by watching the incautious flawless face.

Later, years later, when he became competent to make mistakes for which he could be jailed, and made them and was jailed, *Virgil* had the ability to ponder them every one without regret. But he never lived to be so old as to remember the moments following "*Johnny*? *Johnny Rue*?" without immediate and suffocating self-reproach. They seemed to rush on him swift as thundering wings; he heard words, saw movement, and he came forward quickly to act

—to thrust out a preventing arm—and then, quite suddenly, he was not the animal required.

Together, the effort and the failure took just a moment. "Stop! You *fool*, you! Can't you see you may be— Don't you see? Can't you wait a second, let me talk to you—"

But Terrence flung himself away from restraint and raced up the stairs to the bedroom door and flew inside to Mr. Morley, all the while shouting, "He's *back*! Mr. Morley, he's back, he's *back*! George is here, he's alive, listen, he's well as *anything*! Listen, Mr. Morley, he's back, and *here*—at Rue's—for weeks! For weeks! And he's *swell*! Oh God, he's—he's *here*! Rue says he's healthy as a pig!" He seemed crazed, as if he'd discovered gold; or not gold, but the secret of life instead. He'd borne George and was delivering him up to Mr. Morley. He flung himself on the bed, clasped the sick man and hugged him, without thinking he might be causing pain, or that tears were running down his own face.

Virgil watched, his mouth dry as paper. He thought of words but his throat couldn't release them. Though he knew Morley only slightly, he suspected almost intuitively that he might be witnessing a kind of murder.

After hearing the word *George*, Mr. Morley made a strong fierce motion to pull Terrence off himself—to shake him, or to seize his shirt front and hold him tight, forcing him to coherence. But whether he lacked the strength in his arm or in his spirit to do the thing, he was suddenly too weak for it. His hand fell on Terrence's neck, but gently; and gently he stroked it. He turned his own face into the pillow, and then turned even farther—with apparent effort—so as to hide completely.

Standing above him, Virgil saw the muscles about his jaw collapse their pride, twitch with agony; it was then he realized the indecency of watching, and became unbearably ill at ease. "I'm sorrier than I can say to have intruded at such a moment. Please forgive me." He spoke stiffly; and turned to go. It required all his self-control not to rush from the room.

"Not at all," Morley said dryly. "Not at all. Not such a pregnant moment at all."

Still on the bed, Terrence sat up to look at him in amazement, while, at the door, Virgil stood staring.

But Morley went on matter-of-factly, unemotionally: "Sit down, won't you—Benthon, isn't it, or Benthley? —I used never to forget names, even file clerks I hadn't seen for fifteen years; I'd never forget their names."

"Benthwick. Virgil Benthwick, sir."

"Yes: Virgil. The Englishman. A gentleman. I remember you perfectly. H'm— What've you been doing with yourself lately? Where've you been?"

Mechanically, Virgil answered, "New York."

"New York? New York, the gladiators' arena. You had to go: it's where we have them go to find out if God or the devil made them. I've been wanting Terrence to go. Just to look at it, anyway. But he stays here, like a fool. In case the cook might forget I—h'm—like butter in my milktoast."

Terrence stood up, gaping, but Virgil obeyed Mr. Morley's commanding gesture and took a chair. His face expressed only alertness, but the sharpest, most sympathetic alertness. He looked at nothing but Mr. Morley, who returned his stare; they both ignored Terrence completely, talking about him as though he'd left the room.

"Have you seen his work, Virgil?"

"No, sir. Not yet. I've been here only a few minutes. I was going to ask to, shortly: I've heard high praise from McNaughton."

"He'll be a painter. I think it's possible, some day."

"He always worked harder at it than any of us. No: George worked as hard. Until he found something else he thought more important."

"George? I don't remember anyone by that name. This little fool has reached the point where it isn't work any more, but living. I don't feel a damn bit apologetic about comparing art to business, not at all: when I was in business it was like that for me. Not work at all, after the very first; it was living."

"Sir," Terrence ventured hesitantly, "sir?"

Mr. Morley looked up bleakly, his eyes sunken and dead, without pity. "Well?"

"I—stretched it, sir, to make you feel better, if you thought he'd been safer *longer*, you see?, but I see how terribly stupid it was now, that it worked just the opposite: I meant to say, a while ago, that George went to Rue's yesterday morning, because it's nearest the tracks, and he called from there to find out if you're here; he thought

you might be away on one of your trips, of course he'd no idea you'd been ill, to ask if it's all right for him to come here. He thought you might be too angry to see him." He stopped—the leering travesty of a smile Mr. Morley was giving him had made his throat close self-protectively, scalded with embarrassment. Yet his eyes went on begging, brilliant and blue, almost starting from his head.

Morley gave a sort of laugh. A demon's chuckle, for its hopelessness. His gaze swerved from Terrence to Virgil. "I don't know what will become of him when I'm gone. He isn't quite bad enough for an institution." He began to laugh at that, until something strangling got at his lungs.

Virgil crossed his legs, spoke with the flat British tonelessness designed to conceal anything. "You were made more alike than any father and son I've ever known. Don't turn against yourself."

"This George," Mr. Morley questioned carefully, like a judge, "you didn't talk to him, did you, Terrence? . . . Terrence? You did not talk to him. *Did* you?"

"Yes. Yes!" But neither a blind person nor a deaf would have believed him.

"You talked to George on the phone? Just now?"

"Yes!"

"And you didn't tell him to hold on till you'd connected him with me? Terrence? . . . Why didn't you do that, eh?"

Terrence remembered that Virgil had tried to stop him on the stairs. He pushed fiercely against the nap of the rug with the side of his shoe, and he stared down the length of his body at this foot. His eyelids felt swollen, as if already he'd been crying hard. His lips pouted. His tongue felt as huge and loathsome as an eel. "He wouldn't wait, because he's coming." But there wasn't any use: he knew already Mr. Morley would get everything out of him.

"Johnny, that little nigger kid Johnny—" it was Morley's only sign of rage and hurt; they all heard it; when Morley heard it he insisted to himself he'd always despised Negroes, and he cut away the part of him that had liked Johnny as cleanly as a butcher might slice off his own thumb. "That little nigger kid Johnny called, and told you he had George, and what should he do with him? H'm. I shouldn't wonder." Then his voice went stern again, almost the old Morley voice, though so much weaker. "Terrence, I want you to answer me."

Terrence could not answer. He dropped to the floor and pressed his face against the side of the bed; the sob that came from him was like a tiny explosion, he'd fought it back so long.

Again, Virgil felt the indecency of being a witness to this scene. He got up silently and started to leave the room. Again Mr. Morley stopped him. "I'd ask a favor of you."

"Sir. Of course."

"There was—someone—named George—"

"Yes. Sir, I'm going to telephone your doctor."

"You're going to sit down: you have the wit, I think, to notice when a man's past doctors."

Virgil sat down. Terrence remained where he was, huddled on the floor.

"George is no longer my son. He is dead. He will not come into this house again, not while I am alive. His name will not be mentioned in it. The favor I'm asking you—it may conceivably come up later—is this: do you understand what I just said?" And when Virgil nodded, he demanded it be spoken out clearly. And then: "Will you understand this also? That I am making this fellow here," he pointed to the huddled Terrence, "I am making *him* my son?" His eyes went boring into Virgil. "And answer: d'you think me sane?"

"You are angry, Mr. Morley."

"So angry as not to be sane?"

"So proud—as not to be, perhaps."

"I'd imagined that if you understood anything, you understood pride: such was my impression of you."

"I understand it very well, Mr. Morley," Virgil said coldly. "And I won't lie. You can be assured, sir. What you're doing may be mad. But of course you're sane. Yes."

Morley leaned over the side of his bed a little, and rapped Terrence on the head. "Get me Thompson. On the phone, quick about it. Tell him to drop everything and get over here. I'm making a will. You poor beggar. I used to know you'd be safe, safe and cautious: I was leaving you twenty thousand. Now I've no idea what will become of you. H'm. Poor beggar."

Terrence got himself, thick-voiced, to the phone, and dialed the lawyer's number. Virgil bowed slightly, touched Morley's hand briefly and left, shaken and half-afraid; he wanted to want to hurry to Mc-

Naughton, to tell him what had happened, and wanted most of all to feel young enough to be sure McNaughton could explain it to him, mockingly perhaps, but at least dismissingly.

Mr. Morley became aware, with surprise, that intense physical pain had again begun racking his body, but how long he'd been ignoring it he couldn't guess. He thought with a relief past bitterness that now he might hurry as much as he wished with his dying.

3

winter and spring

they
would
engage
the
enemy

islands and prisons

“‘Our hair grows grey, our eyes are dimn’d, our heat is tam’d—’” he turned and intoned to the man next him in the bar, and the man, a soldier, replied, “Your breath is bad, buddy.”

“*Le mot juste!*” McNaughton muttered, sober enough to avert his head. And rose, forgetting to pay, and found the street.

The bartender was too rushed to catch him in time, but later, investigating the spot McNaughton had vacated, he scowled furiously, kneed him savagely in the groin and kicked his head. The soldier paid for McNaughton’s drink, and, jumping on the bartender from behind a boulder in Guam, slit his throat so tidily no blood fell and so quickly no moan escaped.

The San Francisco winter air rushed cold and laden with sobriety at McNaughton’s head. Cursing himself for having forgot his hat at the library, he roped the scarf more tightly around his throat and found a pair of gloves within his pocket. It was too late now; there’d be no getting drunk tonight. If he went to another place and tried again, he’d almost certainly just get sick. And what a pity that was, for he’d been planning all day for this evening: no breakfast, and only cottage cheese for lunch, and finally even a sentimental journey past the bookshop where she’d caught him. Only half a dozen drinks would have done the trick tonight, with any luck at all.

He might as well go home. The anniversary present had been sent out, a print of Matisse and another of Gauguin. She hated Gauguin

(pretending not to), and he hated prints; well and good. Served them both right. Her for her shameless guile, himself for his weakness.

Virgil had warned him; certainly Virgil had warned him. And to good effect: he'd believed him. But he was the sort of ass, apparently, who had to be watched and warned continuously.

Though that hadn't been so true in those days. One had possessed more pride, then, somehow; he'd still been thinking of himself as more or less important, when Virgil had warned him. The twenties were pride. The thirties were surrender: as soon as you saw thirty coming toward you, you began trying to get the best terms you could for dishonorable peace. Besides, to be merely fair, it had to be granted: Iva hadn't constituted an insignificant opponent. No question about it! Iva had been formidable, so intense, so ever-vigilant. He became his own confessor: *Still, no excuse. Knew her through and through, or should have. Watched her techniques of operation for years: how she'd fawn on supervisors like a starving spaniel, then maneuver her staff with the ruthlessness of Attila! Nothing but weakness, McNaughton; that's all it was, weakness.*

Yet, what a neat prison of traps! First his mother had fallen and broken a hip. And who should move in, actually move in, for most of her two weeks' vacation, but Iva Tillie Leckner? Nursing and cooking and chirping and purring, twitching less and less—so *pathetically* less and less, and oozing tenderness at every pore. Greeting him when he came home; dinner ready; and always that fantastic frontal development suggesting a wealth of sex to be laid regularly on a bed, for just the price of marriage. Marriage: the apron specified it. And invariably she'd scorned thanks: "Oh, Marion, if we can't help each other, what's the good of being alive at all?"

Strengthened by those two weeks, she'd begun treating him more and more intimately, casually referring to his favorite chair, the cereal he disliked least, even to his room—his own precious monastic room—as though everything about him was partially hers or inhabited by her. Until at length the first surrender: he came to see her in the apartment, almost to eat and sleep with her.

Then at a Christmas party she'd persuaded him to escort her to, they drank hot rum punch; daringly, daringly for Iva. He could not dance, but so as to have the chance of examining that incredible bosom with his own, embraced her and moved gingerly from side to side in a crowded corner, taking small steps. And immediately won-

dered why he'd offered himself: of course it was inflaming, but he had known it would be. He'd succeeded only in becoming a little further engaged with the enemy! Half-frantically, he had decided to make the violent move: to cut himself free once and for all. "God damn it, Iva. You drive me wild, you make me into a sort of beast. You, your body and you. You're maddening. A maddening female. Sometimes I think I'll have to quit the library altogether, or at least get a transfer to another department. Ah, God—the constant *enraging* burden of wanting you!" *There, now you have it! Run twittering back into your nineteenth century, and let me out!* With one hand he pressed hard against the small of her back, the maximum of clothed intimacy thus attained, a crudeness he felt sure would be too offensive.

. But Iva Tillie had inerely looked up at him, enthralled. "Oh, Marion!" Her glasses had shone, he'd noticed that much, but if the ticking muscles began their spasm he did not notice. Because she was not resisting him!

"Oh, Marion! You always seemed so—superior to physical things. I never imagined, I never dreamed—"

And her body had gone on, actually encouraging his.

Just in time, he'd seen the danger. "This is not, my dear Iva, a proposal of marriage. We've discussed *that* idea, if you'll remember, and it's not, excuse me but it is simply *not*, for me!"

"No, no, Marion," she had whispered, perhaps a trifle sadly. "No." And the no meant yes, clearly. "I understand you very well. I understand, my dear."

McNaughton had stared down at her, starkly disbelieving. The music had stopped suddenly also, as if appalled. Someone began singing "Silent Night, Holy Night."

In January, furtive as arsonists, they'd flown for a weekend to Rosarita Beach, Mexico.

Their lovemaking was not strikingly successful, but he assured her the first time never was. She was shy, inhibited, coy, and would not let him see her nude. Still, he forgave her everything. He hadn't known a virgin before, and the experience made him feel, against his intelligence, the conqueror, the masterful seducer; even, especially when he didn't think of her age, the sybaritic satyr. He forgave her everything.

But in time the difficulties she kept discovering about arranging a

second rendezvous began to seem insurmountable. It would look odd, she'd pointed out, for them both to be gone two or three days together; how was she to explain another excursion to her mother? And it was so dangerous: they might be seen, and then also the never-*quite-to-be-overcome* risk of pregnancy!

But she loved him—even though he hadn't brought himself to make a like announcement to her—so *much*! She understood so much more about life now than she had before.

And perhaps it was true; he observed the twitching had decreased.

She made it clear she saw him as a great and experienced liver of life. His opinion in everything was the correct opinion. And the respectfulness she harbored for him was nothing at all in comparison to the reverence she had for his poetry! When at last more and more of his poems began appearing in print, her reverence mounted almost to adoration.

The second episode occurred at a place of her choice, a fine hotel in Santa Barbara.

Her bosom he discovered to be pendent, but she called him her lord.

As they left, they saw one of their library pages, on vacation that week, loitering in the hotel lobby, flirting with the switchboard operator. And the lout completely forgot to smack his gum, catching sight of them.

"Never mind, Iva. He isn't a child. This sort of thing happens every day. D'you imagine his interest in that switchboard girl stops at walking her home?"

But Iva had said nothing.

As the weeks went on, they felt rumors all around them. They'd been nothing to McNaughton, playful butterflies only. But he knew they must be worrisome as bats to Iva. Still, she said nothing.

He was browsing in his favorite bookshop once at lunch time, when she'd found him, had come up hurriedly, excitedly, twitching ninety to the minute. "Marion, Marion, *look*!" Opening her purse, she'd taken from it an obscene verse, laboriously printed with blunt purple crayon on coarse tablet paper. It recommended McNaughton for promotion, as reward for heroic services far beyond the call of duty.

"I found it in the Suggestion Box!" and she'd begun to weep.

"Never mind. Just some dirty little child-mind."

"Everyone— Everyone—" But she could not talk, she picked up a book so as to hide her agitation. "Everyone lets me know, one way or another."

"You imagine things."

"I imagined *this*?" she pointed to the verse.

"Could be strictly coincidence. I mean, whoever did this might not have any idea. Or it could have been meant about some other woman, not you."

She looked at him, pleadingly; then again at the book she held. It turned out to be *The Bride's Book of Cookery and Homemaking*. She burst into sobs. "Oh, Ma-aarion!"

She'd been wearing a hat of Madonna blue; a detail he never forgot. It was decorated with some little wistful symbol of a feather, a trailing, begging, crying echo; it did not seem frightening, it seemed wistful. "Iva," covering her hand with his, telling himself he was no great catch either.

They'd been married less than a month when he discovered accidentally that the gaping page had long been a pct of hers and had often told her about his home in Santa Barbara—where he invariably spent his vacations. A second indictment came just weeks later: the box of crayons he chanced upon in Iva's desk drawer; only the purple crayon had been cut, blunted, used.

McNaughton gnashed his teeth, eyes smarting against the raw winter night. So life had dwindled to this, that at thirty-one he marked the anniversary of mating with a mortal enemy! He bought some flowers—for himself, not her. Tomorrow he'd have a cold, surely; a sore throat, from having forgot his hat. He'd stay home with the flowers. He bought two half-pints of bourbon, slipped one in each pocket of his greatcoat. He'd stay home with flowers and bourbon.

He caught an uptown bus. He and Iva had a flat, painted cocoa-brown and appointed with blond furniture, at the edge of town. If it wasn't home, at least it was a place their mothers didn't occupy. Seated, he drew out his billfold, took from it two or three favorable press clippings on his second book of poetry, read them each perhaps half a dozen times, folded them, returned them, smiled with

self-contempt for what he'd done, defining it as the only legal method of masturbating in public. A moment later he softened the analogy to thumb-sucking.

His reflection showed him old and bony-nosed in the war-dimmed bus windowpane. He drew paper and pencil from his pocket and made a note: *When a man, alone with himself, quite alone, is no longer noble or important or wise or valiant even in his own mind's eye, and when he feels neither grief nor guilt at seeing his own emptiness, that man has entered middle age.*

He popped a cough drop into his mouth, wishing that it were opium.

Gladys selected a licorice from the little bag of candy in her purse, and plopped it into her mouth. She worked at it steadfastly, opening her jaws so wide at every chew she might have been having her teeth examined. After a moment or two, what she'd known would happen, happened: the white sergeant who'd been following her for blocks, who'd asked her the time and whether she thought it would rain, who'd finally even boarded this bus to be near her (she felt reasonably certain he didn't know he was bound for San Quentin), began to lose interest. In order to make sure he wouldn't regain it, she faked an expansive uncensored yawn; even considered scratching herself under the arm, but was glad to see that wouldn't be necessary: the licorice display already had him tugging at the bus cord, dismounting with grievance.

She felt a trifle regretful at seeing the last of him, though. For what a pleasant reassurance he'd made, especially to come so unexpectedly! Because a mirror didn't give much of a satisfactory argument, on days you felt you were graying away. Pretending to brush off a speck of dust, she leaned forward and examined her legs; how good they were, how *really* good they were to be attractive even in these horrible wartime rayons! She had to wear slacks at the shipyard where she worked, so it felt nice to be dressed up now for a change—even if it was just to go see that peculiar Englishman, and him in prison.

She told herself she wouldn't bother to go except for Johnny al-

ways telling her to, from England. Almost one letter in five told her, very definitely: on your next day off, you go see him.

She really wouldn't, she told herself, otherwise. Wouldn't take the time and trouble to go see Mr. ———. Like that, for example, it was always on the tip of her tongue to say Mr. Benthwick! Now, why shouldn't she just think of him as Virgil, automatically, the way she would with anyone else? She'd never in her life thought of saying Mr. Morley or Mr. Nixon. But even with him behind bars, there was almost some little *feeling* sometimes. Silly. It was just that he'd always been so—well, aloof, superior. "You pathetic blighter!" he'd snarled at Johnny once, "Are you quite blind?" in connection with something he didn't like about a painting. Well, who was so pathetic now?

A thought she didn't like but enjoyed very much kept trying to be admitted; at last she surrendered to it. Because it was really funny, sort of delightful—only she hated being such a bitch as to get a kick out of it—to think about the way he looked at her now, when she came. You didn't have to be a mind reader. You certainly didn't.

Because he'd always been so above toying with such an idea before. Though God knew there'd been plenty of white men who hadn't. Well, who could tell what would happen next in this world? What you didn't want Monday, you couldn't have Friday.

Quick as a spurt of flame, then, her own wanting: *Oh Christ-God, Johnny! Come home! Don't let them keep you there any more: come home! I think I'll die, it hurts so much, pretending I'm still more or less the same person, getting along all right, without you!* And the old struggle, next: to put the thought of him out of her mind, to put a layer of some other kind of thinking, any other kind, between herself and the pain.

She smoothed her skirt. The brassière she wore was new, firm, her lipstick vermilion, her perfume demanding. She imagined entering the room where Virgil waited—she would hold her body like a dancer's. Then she saw she wasn't teasing merely, wasn't being just capricious, but cruel: she sat up straight and exhaled deeply, in a great sigh, and shook her head as if to clear it, trying to rid herself of cruelty and pain.

Last night she'd gone to her in-laws. She went there more and more: they knew Johnny, they really knew about him, and you could

talk about him, on and on if you wanted to, and nobody thought you were crazy. Mrs. Rue did sometimes, maybe, but you could ignore her.

Mr. Rue advised: "Just a hundred years ago, they was sellin' us apart, any time they felt like it, Gladys. Bein' married didn't matter none. Bein' a mother or father didn't matter none. And then you'd *never* see the other one again! Why, chile, *this* ain't so bad. You can write; they couldn't even write. Look at it like: ever' day, you's each one that much more important to the other, you'll both know it, an' you won't forgit it."

"He is to me, but—"

"You is to him, too, Glad, you foolish woman! Of *course* you is! Can't you see that fact just as plain?"

Mrs. Rue: "It ain't like you was newlyweds. You been man and wife ten years. Eight, in the sight of God."

"Oh Dad, *now* isn't like then: a hundred years ago a person would know that might be going to happen, you'd be *expecting* it!"

Mr. Rue shook his head, smiled in a sad little way. "Tell me somethin', Gladys: you expectin' to die? *Much*, I mean?"

Mrs. Rue's reproving voice: "You should've had kids. They'd be your comfort."

"Gladys, honey, you write him every day, don't you? And he's always writin' you? So what's to worry—"

"Yes, Dad, but— Holy Moses, the way he writes sometimes! Like yesterday: 'This fair and pleasant land. . . .' Imagine that! From Johnny! 'This fair and pleasant land!' You know good and well he never in his life talked like that!"

Mrs. Rue suggested that maybe he was taking some kind of a course, like in night school, to improve himself. "He should've finished college. Not dropped out halfway through like he did. He's a Lieutenant. He's just tryin' to improve hisself."

But Gladys and Mr. Rue had looked darkly into each other's eyes at that moment, their mutual fear revealed. They'd both hurried to deny it. Gladys, furiously: "Well *naturally*, he's a Lieutenant, Ma! What of it? What difference would being a Lieutenant make? If that Terrence guy could be a Lieutenant, I should sure think Johnny could!" And Mr. Rue: "I wouldn't pay no 'tention to how

he sounds in his letters, Glad. It could be on account of he don't have time to paint none, so he'd like to write his letters a little fancy, don't y'see?"

That was it, that was the reason. She reminded herself of it now. Johnny wasn't growing away from her, and wouldn't try to get up past her.

Because it wasn't as if he hadn't been anybody at all before. He'd been selling more and more paintings, even making enough money, toward the last. He was used to how the critics wrote about him, and he didn't get a swelled head from that. *The disciplined passion, the fierce gentleness of Mr. Rue's palette . . .* they wrote. Whatever in hell *fierce gentleness* was supposed to mean.

But of course they were right: Johnny was—the skin of him, the hair of him, the hands, the full lips—a fierce gentleness.

She told herself she wouldn't worry about a thing, she'd worry about nothing at all, if only it weren't for the way he always kept asking her to send him presents to give to all those English people, especially things for their wives and mothers, even lingerie and stockings sometimes. She knew it really *was* for their wives and mothers, but still— And on Christmas, he wrote, he'd been invited to a white party and had to stay the night, and the white man slept on the floor and gave Johnny his bed! White folks acting like that, not just a few special artists you'd gone to school with, but general people you just now met, acting that way! It was crazy, it would have terrified her to shivering. But Johnny just took it in his stride. And he went to dances, white dances sometimes—though she didn't know if he really danced: he didn't write that part.

She reminded herself she was very white-looking, could almost pass for a white, whereas Johnny was a terribly black sort of nig—

Suddenly she hated Virgil with sharp fury. *His* prison was after all such a beautiful place, a big beautiful place, where he could be with thousands of other people enjoying the view of San Pablo Bay, and he deserved to be there anyway, she didn't care what Johnny said about it, but *her* prison was to be all alone in an ugly little pressing band of pain that got itself tight around her every morning as soon as she woke up. It was right there next her on the bed, waiting for her every morning, as soon as she woke up— And there was only one

way for her to get out of it: to imagine Johnny had been killed, or badly wounded, which she did deliberately sometimes—so she could rush back inside again, glad to be inside again.

She remembered that the Englishman had dared to mutter once, at one of Johnny's shows: "Rue's vision was old when Nineveh was young!"

She held her body like a dancer's, entering his prison.

She was very gay. She gave Virgil, cleverly, half a dozen jokes she'd saved and memorized for him. As they talked and laughed together, she noticed how everyone stared at them, the guards and the prisoners and the other visitors—hot glances bedding them deep in ultimate taboo. Her flesh felt awakened, as if warmed by a new summer's sun.

When Virgil, perhaps because of the cruel naked perfume, named her "a witch with witch-eyes flecked in gold," she wished there could be truth in it, that she could have enormous magic power—enough to leave her prison, enough to stop the war, enough to crush her enemies near and far, even if her enemies might hide themselves in—Johnny.

On the tight, right, green little island he loved, Lieutenant Johnny Rue continued to be as faithful about friendships as the next man; so he told himself. More faithful: he wrote to Virgil Benthwick regularly, though the address was a prison and he wasn't always answered. Just as in the United States, he kept up the same respectful relationship with McNaughton, though certainly it wasn't an easy thing to do—McNaughton's growing hypochondria was increasingly hard to take, and besides, it wasn't his fault he could make a living from painting while McNaughton couldn't from poetry, and he hated feeling guilty about it. It didn't necessarily mean he'd sold out. He hadn't sold a damned thing out. He painted the way he painted and enough people liked it so well he could do it for a living and that was all there was to it. McNaughton could point out as much as he wanted that mankind never appreciates what is new and different in art but only what is readily recognizable, and he'd agree just fine. But, still and all, the critics hadn't been rough enough on McNaughton for *him* to go around thinking he was so damned advanced, either.

The critics had been pretty nice to McNaughton, by and large, and the only difference between their states financially—McNaughton's and his own—was that people didn't buy poetry. Nothing to be superior about. Yet Johnny continued the relationship as before, respectful as he'd always been before. (He drew the line at Iva Tillie, that was true, but then she'd drawn the line at him first.) And his friendship with good old Robb Nixon went on pretty much as it always had, despite Terrence. Nor was it fair to count the break with Terrence as severing a friendship. When he'd been friends with Terrence, he'd thought Terrence was different. When he saw what he was really like, sucking up to Mr. Morley to get his money and turning him against George, naturally he wasn't friends with him any more. Besides, he could tell—you could always tell right away with whites—at practically the very moment Terrence had decided it was too awkward to have him around. Terrence hadn't been living very long at all in Mr. Morley's house before he got too grand for colored. So to hell with him forever, and to the hottest part of hell; but you couldn't count that as being unfaithful to a friendship.

And George—Lord God! How could he possibly have been a better friend to George? He'd fed him and housed him and listened to him and gone communistic for him and cared about him terribly. And had tried hard to put him together again after he came back from Spain. He'd done everything he could conceivably do for George, and then to get socked in the jaw—so savagely a tooth got knocked out—because of just telephoning his father and then just telling George his father was pretty bad off and wanted to see him. . . . And then the crazy way George took off, for God knows where, and when Terrence came looking for him, crying, "Where is he? What've you done with him?" almost as if he'd killed him and thrown him in the bay practically, well, hell— It'd certainly left Gladys and him in a funny position, the way George had gone off like that.

Anyway, all that was a long time ago, back in '39. And he'd finished with it. But then suddenly to have George run into him over here—and be just a corporal, not of course that that mattered—and still so horribly uncouth, and come right into the Officers' Quarters (of course the other officers could understand it a little bit, because George was white, but still it wasn't a good situation) and act like he belonged there, and call him "Rue, you dumb bastard!" and say

four-letter words in front of everyone! But the worst thing was the way he acted with English people—and Johnny had never known nicer people—so insulting all the time. George simply made it very clear he hated the English. He was inexcusably rude. You were in their country, and the least you could do was be civil. It created a bad impression for him, a colored officer, a gentleman by Act of Congress, even to know anyone like that. Especially since there was no explaining him away by saying he was an artist. A lumberjack is a pretty awkward thing to say your own contemporary is, in a way, to strangers. He didn't mind at all saying his own father worked as a railroad porter, because that was a different generation and everyone understood about slavery, but George— Well, George, when you came right down to it, George was getting to be a God damned nuisance.

He thought of leaving word with his batman that he was out, next time Morley came around, but that seemed too skunky a thing to do. Preparing for dinner, he buffed his nails.

Tried for a while to think how his father would handle such a situation. But it was impossible: he couldn't imagine his father, ever, as an Army officer.

His eye caught a framed sketch he'd done of Gladys, and he told her he loved her still. He longed for her quickly, intently—then cut off the feeling brutally. He'd never let himself miss her to the point of becoming a living ache for her. He missed her as much, and no more, as was manly. The Army had given him responsibility, importance; he commanded men, expected to have to lead them into battle someday. He would be loyal, competent always. Glancing into the mirror, he couldn't help admiring his insignia's swift glint of gold.

Turning to the chest of drawers for a fresh handkerchief, he saw Gladys' latest letter resting where he'd dropped it on the bed. He'd already gone through it once, but he picked it up and looked at it again. She was so touching.

Do you care if I wear glasses, when you come back, Johnny? I think my eyesight's failing—because every time I see a headline that has Youth in it or Yule or Yale, it always looks like Yoli to me. And you want to know something else? I keep seeing somebody who looks just like you, on the street. Only he's not in uniform. (You look better than anybody could ever look, in your uniform.) He's always going around a corner or getting out of sight some other way or changing to look dif-

ferent when I come up close, though. You ever have trouble like that? I hope so.

Yoli, their code word for *I love you* from so long ago.

He told himself he didn't have a guilty conscience.

Always had been faithful, in one sense, to Gladys, and always would be. No matter what happened, he'd never so long as he lived make her feel inferior. He couldn't be more grateful for her loving him, for being his wife, even supporting him all those years, never complaining and always encouraging him. Yet whenever he remembered exactly *how* she'd supported them, working as a rest-room attendant, he couldn't help flinching: it seemed part of such a terribly bad dream.

He was with the 99th Pursuit Squadron and very proud to be its Liaison Officer with the 79th Pursuit Group, very proud to be in an organization praised by General Mark Clark; very proud that it was chiefly because of his letters his nephew Archie and a dozen of Archie's friends had rushed to join the Air Force on the first moment possible. And Johnny recognized his own pride, was proud of his own pride. And it was possibly just because of his pride that whenever certain parts of his life flashed before him—for example, that Gladys could never be completely purged of having *been* that—he found himself longing for a chance at battle. Remaining calm during the frequent bombings over here wasn't nearly enough for what he needed. He saw himself actually on the attack, vigorously on the offensive. If he led even a dozen men with courage, or brought down a single enemy in blood, some part of that past would be corrected.

Gladys, Yoli.

Yet a man grew. He could almost feel himself growing, sometimes. It was astonishing, how stimulating the Army and England had been. Assuming responsibility for one's enlisted men, the wielding of authority.

And take the matter of women, for example. Except for a few minor and more or less juvenile little episodes before they'd met, his experience with women had been entirely limited to Gladys. Which was as he'd expected it to go on being. But England had tumbled him around, hitting his old ideas pretty hard. He'd never been the sort of fool who thought it a miracle if just *any* white woman made

herself available; there'd been women like that even in the United States, so far as that went, though they'd been scarcely human. But here in England all sorts of girls made it clear they thought Negroes attractive. The intellectuals particularly, for some reason. After a while, he'd begun to see things differently.

The first one, a journalist, had left him absolutely dumb, shocked dumb. She was very good looking but she'd taken quite a lot of getting used to. "No one ever satisfies anyone else, Johnny; not on every plane. So in order to keep oneself nourished at all well, it's essential to be constantly on the alert for the proper *set* of mates, companions. (I say 'constantly' because we're always changing.) To match and *liberate* the different people we are, in ourselves. Don't you see? The idea of *totally* mating with any one person is preposterous. There'd not be the slightest mathematical chance of it. What one wants to do is to select complementary factors. For example, I find you enormously stimulating physically, but I doubt we could ever begin to travel together in Beethoven, really companionably, as my husband and I do."

She'd defined fidelity as nothing more than the improbable agreement to go on laughing forever at the same lines in *Punch*. "A voluntary confinement, actually, in a very tedious prison, Johnny. . . ."

Nevertheless it had been ridiculous, how guilty he'd felt at his first liberation.

Of course that was all past now. A man grew. Johnny could almost feel himself growing.

The whole rotten decaying island made George feel imprisoned.

It was too small a place to have held so many people for so long, that should be obvious to anyone. It was wearing down, and would sink out of sight altogether one of these days. Sink from the weight and deadness on it, from too many old corpses weighing heavy in it, from too many outmoded ideas carefully propped up, maintained with stupid careful effort to keep out cleanness and growth. It was an undernourished little place; and long ago had been too late for anyone to try to feed it back to health.

When the bombs began raining on it at night, George often in-

vited them to multiply; he told them to get the slums and the palaces, and the people and the smugness. The hypocrisy, and the caste slavery. He excepted only the countryside, but who could ever get to see the bloody countryside?

He was stationed near Soho Square and spent his free evenings prowling furiously on its streets, enraged at nearly everything he saw; feeling caged, a caged lion seething. Pounded its cheap crowded streets with the heels of his boots; his hands balled, unconsciously, into fists, and his eyes seeking, contemptuously, some Limey strong enough to be smashed without being killed. The German enemy was not even an enemy, by comparison to these men-substitutes. Germans had grown themselves muscles, hardness. They were not friends of his, but they were no more enemies than Englishmen.

It was such a ridiculous bother, anyway, such foolishness, to choose sides in this sort of holocaust. Nothing would be fundamentally different, when it was over, no matter which side won. In just a few years, the partners would change about—a square dance, a tennis match; an old senseless pattern, the same since history began. And to think he'd been the idiot once to go *seeking* war! Ready to die, believing like such an ass in the entire pack of putrid hokum!

Alone. He recognized himself more alone on the earth than if he were the only man on it. A proud, cold, furious solitary confinement. Most decidedly voluntary. He belonged to nothing, would not belong to anything, scorned belonging to anything. Everywhere he looked, men had traced their imbecility. And the greatest imbecility of all was their struggle to leave off being apes.

He saw an Indian standing tall and black before a shop window; ceremoniously turbaned, solemn, a foreign lord—but staring at displays of shoddy jewelry, rings and silver coffee spoons with absorbed simplicity. For some reason—there was no knowing why, but it was the sort of thing that happened often lately—George felt torn, actually rent to the point of crying agony for a moment, by the sight of him. He threw the feeling away, snatched it out of his chest and threw it away: a feeling meant for someone else, it must have been, but landing on him by mistake; there was no sense to it.

And then he thought of something hilarious. There could never be anything funnier. Johnny Rue, stinking little Johnny Rue, turning into such a puffed-up ass over the Army's gesture toward democracy.

Johnny Rue thinking he'd done something or other, aside from painting—and George gave him full credit there—to get where he was: somebody to be called "sir." It was incredible. It was so funny you could laugh your guts out. Oh, and dearie me, how he did keep manicured! The moons of his nails were blue. Blue moons. That's how you could tell Negroes, even supposing their skins were white. Never so blue as when well manicured. And acting as though he'd pop an artery if you slurped your soup or blew your nose at table. Though Christ knew he'd probably not even figured out what a handkerchief was for until he'd come of age.

Until he'd come of age— So long ago, when they'd come of age. Several thousand years ago, approximately.

It seemed impossible Johnny had been his best friend. And yet, if not Johnny, who? He'd never been able to endure Virgil for long at a time—what a laugh, Sir Haughty in the calaboose! McNaughton had turned out to be too boneless and bloodless finally; Robb at last had become just Betty's brother; and Terrence—well, good God, Daddy's Dearest Boy! When he'd come back from Spain, it hadn't even occurred to him to go anywhere but to Rue's. Gladys and Johnny—his best friends. Incredible!

And then how clumsy and obvious—and good and unendurably loyal—they'd been in trying to smooth over his own stupidity. Not rubbing it in, not once asking him how did he like to be made the fool, never making him tell what he had seen for himself by then, seen really even before the fighting was over in Spain. How savagely he'd hated their frightened kindness! He'd loathed it then and he despised it now.

And then taking it on themselves finally to tell him what to do: *Go see your father. Collin says he's sick. Go home to your father, please, George!* Gladys finally crying, saying she was an orphan!

What the hell did he care if she was an orphan? Everyone was an orphan. As soon as your mother got you outside her body, you were an orphan.

George hired a whore—they were as frequent as lampposts in this lofty country—and took her to a room and used her brutally, delighting her.

The intercourse lasted only a few minutes. But even for most of that short time, he couldn't banish Johnny from his mind. He

clouted him, spat at him. "You stinking coon," he muttered, the woman wriggling under him.

When he'd finished with her, she got up, dressed, prepared to leave. Her action enraged him further: he hadn't said she could go.

He pulled her down heavily, roughly, ripped away her clothes, in a moment was engaged with her again—this time mightily, as though so long as his power endured the world lasted, life lasted.

This time so powerfully he was the god who willed all life. It was he—the whole building shouted it, worshiping him—who'd created the world and who'd let the sun out of darkness. There'd not even be agony when he was finished, but only death, death of everything on the earth, death of all the cattle, the monkeys, death of all the birds and beggars, death of hope and death of pain, death of all the eyes that saw sunsets, death of all the pine trees holding snow, death of all the oaks with their roots twisted and strong and gnarled like himself, seeking the water, sweet and cool for permitting life, and even death of death itself.

Atlas to the world, supporting it so long there seemed to be no other world, he transported them both out of reason, himself and the woman.

He relinquished her no longer gasping, but stunned past breathing to have endured what she knew so certainly could not have happened.

He lay trembling like a boy.

His body seemed illuminated, a shining opalescence; his eyes felt so widely open they'd never again be closed. No more than she, could he believe what had happened.

He felt purified, and entirely at peace. It occurred to him he'd experienced something like a child's notion of meeting God; he'd seen into the secret core of existence. He realized, without words, that he'd touched, no, pressed with his entire body against the pulse of a universal heart.

But he wanted the woman gone quickly: she was only accidental to the experience and shouldn't be allowed to dilute it by still being there, by being herself.

On the bed, he shoved toward her all the money he carried: not for her, but only because he wanted to be rid of money.

He closed his eyes to return to the vision, shut his ears to go back to the pulse.

But the creature was crumpled beside him, sobbing. She moaned, "No, no—" She reached her hand up, fearfully, for his face.

He was about to thrust her aside roughly, when, inexplicably, he understood why she sobbed, why she moaned the *no*: it would not come again, in all her life, this moment; it could not come again. Not knowing it existed, she'd lived without it very well. How was she to live now?

"Poor little tart," he growled softly, pressing her hand to his cheek. "Poor thin little ruined tart. . . ."

The next hour he discovered, and the next day he rediscovered, that the experience had betrayed him. All the hatred was gone out of him.

The English were of course preposterous, but somehow he no longer wanted to smash them. They were perhaps like bantams, but at any rate bantams had good spirit in them. Their masochistic cuisine might even be Spartan. Their childish show of homage to royalty began to make him want to laugh, rather than to gnash his teeth and hurl a bomb.

Even Johnny Rue no longer moved him to anger. Whatever was absurd about Johnny was not Johnny's fault.

He'd felt sometimes, before lying with the English whore, that he might murder someone. The Army had made him want to murder occasionally: officers and sergeants. And not being able to master the great logs any more, to roll them and control them, to bring them down like conquered giants, had made him want to murder. And not being able to breathe the sharp clean air of Minnesota again, but only to hack and choke in the hateful soup of London, had sometimes made him want to murder. Whenever he had remembered anyone, before the whore, from his past life, he'd thought "To hell with him!" Sometimes he'd even seen remembered faces dead. Beautiful Terrence Collin, the sure and righteous Communists, the sickly McNaughton, the ridiculous posing Benthwick, debutantes whose tittering had made him feel he was molesting precocious children; the immaculate servant Tokyo, so unctious—he could have wiped them out, all out, pretending they'd never been. And now suddenly, after the woman, he was seeing them as real again; they even grew important; perhaps larger than he, though they remained so distant.

His anger had burst like a boil. He was free of it, but the driving power it had given him was gone. He'd been betrayed.

When the feeling that he might go mad sometime, so mad as to murder, had recurred—he'd first met it in Spain—it had made him keep knives away from his hand for several months, during almost all the London duty. (Guns were a different matter; if guns killed, it would be by deliberate order of his brain.) But less than a fortnight after the fantastic illumination, suddenly his father was sitting at their old library table, holding a wineglass. He said, "Sir!" in his mind, and went close to him and looked down at his head, gazed at it proudly, so full-haired, and told him seriously he was glad to be his son, it wasn't a family you were apt to go bald in— They'd both laughed a little, because sometimes they used to when they were happy, even without a joke— It was just that much, just an instant of a waking dream, but he'd felt the old pain go out of him as if at last it was able to find a door. Suddenly he could love his father as he'd loved him before he'd hated him, and knives were safe with him again.

Then it began to puzzle him, like something stated ambiguously in a history book, that he hadn't gone to his father's house when Rue had urged him to. He proposed for explanation pride—that his father would have mocked him for the long painful error. But he had mocked himself. He suggested for excuse contempt—that his father had been still the great bloodsucking lord, vampire to the poor. But he had come to know the poor. And at last he named Terrence the cause—that Collin had got his place, had earned it. But Collin was a toy, not a man; a toy didn't take a man's place.

Then one night when the German bombs came, they brought him something new: a choking dread.

He was astonished at himself: because so far as he knew, it had been some years since he'd thought of death with terror; he was not afraid of nothingness. Night after night the fear returned, however. He examined it and reexamined it almost frantically; there was a strangeness about it that left him shaking.

When finally he saw it, saw certainly what it was, he groaned aloud, his very spirit groaned, demolished or in agony. He had been betrayed indeed: he was afraid of his own aloneness, afraid to die in aloneness.

The pressure of having people constantly around him exacerbated Terrence almost beyond endurance. There were times when just a single day's complete aloneness would have been worth a handsome price. He could endure his fellow men well enough when he was on duty; the annoyance arose whenever he picked up a brush during his free hours: they flocked quickly, gaping over his shoulder. Respectful and curious and awed and fascinated. Helpful with suggestions or tensely silent. Unbearably distracting.

He spent most of the war in the Hawaiian Islands, a Special Services Officer. Beginning with 1945, he was billeted in a three-bedroom cottage with several other junior grade officers on Fort Kamehameha, half an hour's drive from Honolulu. One or two landmarks were still preserved on the post to remind the complaisant of how much damage had been suffered there during the shattering Sunday morning of Pearl Harbor. And surprise nighttime alerts were held for the same reason: *To your battle stations!* harsh voices commanded, ripping sleep out of the dark gentle nights. The Japanese might strike again—though no one thought so. No one at all had really thought so for a year or two, but still the chagrin of Pearl Harbor pricked sharply among major ranks. And the very weather, the balmy enervating atmosphere, the opulence of color, indeed everything about Hawaii, seemed at cross-purposes with military vigilance. Wars hadn't been popular for a long time there; persuaded by their setting, the natives had come to prefer cloaks of brilliant feathers.

"Don't worry about me," Terrence wrote to his friends; "this is paradise. Nature gone mad with color, utterly extravagant with it. Even the dirt is mostly red or black."

Mrs. Good, at least, believed him. She'd answered his assurance in a tidy housekeeperly script. "Well, then, please worry about us a little, sir. Because all the boys are rough, but the paratroopers are the hardest of all on your furniture. It's their boots, I imagine, that makes the difference. If you'd just allow me to store a *few* of the carpets. As I have mentioned before, it's hard to be responsible, with you so far away. I feel it—*responsible*. Mr. Morley was as patriotic as anyone, but God rest his soul I often wonder what he'd have to say to this, perhaps I'm getting old, if you'll excuse me sir."

Terrence smiled at the impertinence. He'd lent his house for the

soldiers' use; he wasn't about to suggest they take their shoes off. Besides, he had his own problems with furniture. Day rooms, mess halls, recreation halls, libraries, ambulatory patients' lounges, chapels, service clubs—they all had to be furnished, and furnished at least as luxuriously as the post next door. Invariably, it turned out to be *his* duty to see that they were: wherever he was assigned, the preceding Special Services Officer had fallen down on the job.

He found himself forever having to inveigle hard-bitten quartermasters into indulgence, or, if that failed, to coax commanding officers into spending Post Recreation funds—and, if they were Regular Army men or had ambitions of becoming Regular Army men, this last was very difficult to do: they were so jealous of their future peacetime reputations for thrift. Terrence had at last grown bold enough for "moonlight requisitioning"; he scrounged superbly, and inspired his noncoms to scrounge for him. He engaged in three- and four- and five-part swapping arrangements, all paperless, with Air Force and Navy supply officers, even with the Merchant Marine and with the Seabees, and he learned to bargain shrewdly. Whenever he remembered a remark Mr. Morley had made once while teaching him about stocks and bonds—the surprised observation that he wasn't stupid—he thought it sad he couldn't show him this facet of his ability. Mr. Morley would have been delighted.

He couldn't help being aware he'd made something of a name for himself with the Army: he worked so hard that it became quite standard to suppose that, after Lieutenant Collin had been assigned to a Post for a while, its juke-boxes would be the especially atrocious kind flashing a hundred colored lights, its prayer benches in chapel would be padded, its volley balls would hold their air pressure, and its librarians would have money to buy such books as the War Department did not provide. He knew to the comma the Army's regulations about funds and supplies: how much was allotted per man per company, per battalion, per regiment, and about the division commanders' "open checks" for overseas use; he knew which supplies were considered expendable and which nonexpendable, he could explain the difference between Army accountability and Army responsibility so clearly it could be understood by everyone in his training classes—by bedazzled service club hostesses, by enchanted Red Cross

girls, by enamored Army librarians, by everyone. After a while, he could argue with finance officers and commanding officers like a crack insurance salesman.

He worked hard: it became equally standard with him for the end to justify the means. His appeals to the patriotism of local merchants were effective, but calculated. From Hawaii, shiploads of soldiers were constantly being sent "down under"—to Guam, to the Marianas, to Kwajalein. In order to effect a better price when purchasing athletic equipment, Terrence was never too proud to remind Honolulu dealers that they might be stocking "the last gymnasium these boys will ever see." And always he was shrewd enough not to mention what was obvious: that he too might be sent down under, the next week, the next month. And he was capable of watching the business faces a bit pitilessly, noting impersonally how his gallantry and handsomeness made generosity grow. Before the war, he'd carried on an affectionate little intrigue with a nationally popular songstress, an episode so friendly in nature as to be openly concurrent with the brief attachment existing between her famous orchestra-leader husband and himself. From his island, Terrence wrote them both letters of gentle reminiscence; and they, in their own way ferociously sentimental, responded as he'd expected: pulled all sorts of strings to provide his dance halls with enviable bookings.

Once when he discovered that a hoarding supply officer had let thousands of phonograph records become warped in a warehouse—where they'd been savagely guarded against use and later written off on inventory as "fair wear and tear"—he'd immediately blackmailed the fellow into delivering truckloads of ping-pong tables to out-of-the-way substations in Terrence's area of control.

And none of these techniques ever once made him suppose he might have the slightest cause to be conscience-ridden. He was positive he was fighting the war.

He saw plenty of reasons for fighting as well as he could: war was an unforgivable interruption, it must be ended as quickly as possible. Because he had to get on with his painting.

War meant the agony of not being able to work more than a dozen hours a week, and at that, work in the abominably difficult weather of Hawaii, using limited materials of inferior quality, and with so many minor emergencies always coming up that picture after

picture had to be left unfinished or abortively finished. War even meant he might be killed and couldn't paint at all any more. It meant the Nazis might win and order him to paint for Göring's tastes. It meant his father might rise from the dead in the form of ugliness in power.

The lushness, the balm, the beauty of the Hawaiian Islands couldn't begin to soothe him. The truth was—though no one he worked with ever came close to guessing it—that he fought the war in terror; woke stiff with it at night and lay trembling through the beautiful dawns. But because a part of his idea of winning the war was to conceal weakness, he took marvelous care that no one should guess this side of him. Every psychological collapse or shadow of collapse meant another delay in winning, that much was obvious to him.

Colonels called him "a regular go-getter." And corporals described him as "a right little guy." Nevertheless Terrence hadn't been so nervous since Mr. Morley's illness, nor so miserable since his death. The war was his prison. Only Allied victory could bring parole.

Aside from painting, he was able to find only one release: talking to Robb occasionally across the Pacific.

Robb's voice was like the warm touch of an expert masseur on his back, on his tight neck muscles, on his arms that had lost their hands. Robb told him all the things he had to hear: that the war would be over soon, that Terrence was doing a superb job as Special Services Officer and would have even greater painting power later because of the layoff and the experience—and was anyway among the best artists of his generation; that the soldiers were appreciating the house he'd lent them and not abusing it, that he'd find everything the same on his return, and that Robb lived for his return. Robb's tongue never shaped these last words, but his voice itself said them; after listening to him, Terrence was able to go back to his own way of winning the war, more at peace than in a long time.

In January: "Did you hear the news yesterday, Terrence, about Hitler's saying he expected the Germans to fight till the last man was killed in the streets of Berlin?"

"Yes, I did." But why was Robb sounding so cheerful about such a thing? He'd thought it terrifying.

"Well, didn't that—*please* you? I mean, it seemed pretty obvious

to me he's panicking, didn't it to you? If he'd said 'Germany,' I wouldn't have thought so much about it, but to say 'Berlin' itself!"

"Don't you think he means it? I don't quite get it."

"Why, I suppose *he* means it all right. But I doubt very much the Germans he's talking about would mean it."

"I don't know, Robb. They're pretty fanatic."

"Anyway, the point is he wouldn't be talking like that, he wouldn't even be *thinking* like that, if he still had the slightest real hope of winning!"

"Oh? I guess you're right, at that." And he remembered hopefully that just yesterday he'd moved an Allied button onto an inch marked *Tannenburg*: the Russians had taken it. "Things *have* been getting pretty rocky for him."

"I think he must've known he was smashed when his lines in Poland collapsed. He isn't an idiot, after all. I really don't see how it *can* go on too much longer now."

"God, I hope you're right, Robb. No, Operator, we're not finished. Just another minute, please."

"To tell you the truth, Terry, the other armchair generals around here aren't giving it much past April—and I'm inclined to agree. So you just keep on rotting valiantly in those stinking Hawaiian trenches like Sassoon or somebody, O.K.?"

"You're pretty funny. Riotous. And those last brushes you sent were lousy."

"Sorry. The clerks keep muttering about some kind of a war going on."

"We've a club over here where we list all the people who say that, and after the war we're going to garrote them."

"Is that a fact? All I remember saying was don't get sunburned and try not to fall off your water skis."

"You're not in Siberia yourself."

"True. I've the impression they'd like us to hang up now, Lieutenant. So—good-bye, Terry."

"What did you think of the water colors I sent?"

"I didn't mention them because there's a letter on its way to you about them. Babbling, I'm afraid. On the order of a guaranteed brook. I mean, Lieutenant, sometimes you impress me."

For days after such a conversation, Terrence was almost home again.

Home wasn't so much the soldiers' mansion in Berkeley as Robb's little shack at Laguna Beach. He remembered gratefully that when he'd collapsed—after Mr. Morley's death and the terrible thing of having all that money—Robb had let him come there, had given him pills, had made him swim in the ocean every day, cold or not, and had coaxed him out of the crying fits he kept having, and, gradually, had got him to work again. It was a good studio, with your models usually there and yet never there in such a way as to bother you. It had been fine to have Robb to talk to in the late afternoons when he'd come home from his classes; it had even seemed necessary, somehow, just to keep from going mad. He was still grateful. Because he'd not be here today, fighting the war—he'd be in some mental hospital, probably, if Robb hadn't saved him, back in '39.

It was a thing you could never say and weren't even supposed to think; but there were a good many things like that, and a man didn't necessarily have to keep pretending to himself, every moment, alone. The truth of the matter was, Robb recognized, that it was harder to be a civilian in wartime than it was to be a soldier.

The war had uprooted him—with the tool of gas rationing—from the little shack he'd so loved in Laguna, and had got him shut up in an expensive unpleasant apartment in Long Beach. It had taken Terrence away, to surround him with a dozen dangers Robb had no way of fighting for him—the danger of being shipped down to the Japanese, to be killed, tortured, maimed, starved, broken by them; the danger of being stultified artistically by the Army in Hawaii; the danger of being pressed so close between the twin beasts of military life—eternal lack of privacy and constant psychological isolation—that the mechanism of his mind might surrender and withdraw, leaving nothing of him but what was after all the core of every man, a lost, foolish child. Robb admitted, when alone, the selfish and unattractive truth: war was harder on civilians than on combatants. Because he had never felt so powerless. Had there been any reason—

able sort of clearinghouse, he'd gladly have proposed all manner of bargains: take a dozen of my bones, but grant that this or that horror won't find him; take a lung and a kidney, an eye or an ear if you like the way I grew them, but keep him safe from this particular disaster or that. It seemed cruel there could be no market for himself, he was willing to set the price so low. He pitied himself and admitted, defiantly, that he was pitying himself: he couldn't even write letters as often as he'd like; too many would look odd, someone might somehow reach the correct conclusion.

The only thing he saw to do, and he did it, was to undertake a really impressive load of classes: finally he was teaching things as remote from his interests as Advertising. His goal, every day, was to be so exhausted by nightfall there'd be small chance of fear or despair or desire or longing or the hurt of too-sharp hope. His students were mainly girls, or, like himself, marked men. They seemed to huddle before him, frightened into mocking by the passion of Van Gogh; he thought them all, himself included, like biddies gathered around a pot of lukewarm tea, trying to be cozy while a storm raged outside. Forty per cent of the nation's young men were unfit for military service, had been rejected; he reminded himself of this often, and never could believe it: *all* the men, all the manliness in the country, seemed to be gone. There was only enough strength left in himself—his own rejection had made him feel so powerless—to manage the proper tone for those rare telephone conversations with Terrence on the unbelievable island. He congratulated himself on those, and on his letters, but that was all.

He had the narcotic of Terrence's paintings, though. Hundreds of them, Terrence being such a fantastically prolific artist. Every phase of his development, from the painstaking, conscientious, bewildered amateur to the brilliant and certain master craftsman, was there. Portfolio after portfolio of sketches sheltered in the apartment's cabinets, always maintaining such liveliness as to seem to await their next examination impatiently. The walls of the place—its owner be damned—were literally covered with Terrence's oils, framed and unframed, finished and unfinished; his infatuation with the *a prima* technique was recorded thoroughly, all over the dining room; his period of clinical experimentation with thick grayish underpainting

was documented in the bedroom; remnants of an excessive respect for the palette knife's cleanliness lodged chiefly around doorways and windows. His battles with the "middle distance" hadn't always been successful, but Robb kept those up too: some obscure need for rigid impartiality in him demanded he do so. The early clevernesses were there for the same scrupulous reason—those months Terrence had been nearly out of his mind because he'd learned that forty thousand different hues of color had actually been recorded; and the absurd time he'd gotten so hideously drunk on the discovery that a ray of red light corresponded to the key of C, both of them sharing the glory of attaining four hundred and seventy-seven billion vibrations per second, or whatever it was! All those clamorous disturbances, involving "inherent synesthetic perceptions" and so on, and then Terrence's panic he might be among the ninety-five per cent of humanity incapable of them—all such things Robb kept track of carefully on the landlord's walls.

And finally, the triumphs: infinitely subtle gradations of tone, complex but always harmoniously graded patchworks of color, modeling unlike the modeling of any master or of any school, yet not forced and not buying its originality at the price of truth, but altogether genuine and fresh: "I saw this. This *was*," the best paintings said. "This tree was crying. This man was made of nine main parts, and two were white. Here is the dimension of blood, if you should heat it. This shade of blue is a lie detector: hold it against your life."

Robb's shack at Laguna had been open to almost everyone; he turned wary of inviting many people to his place at Long Beach. Loneliness was far more bearable than having that mood which was given by the best of Terrence's pictures destroyed. In one work, Terrence had achieved a texture in clouds that Robb hadn't seen matched before, not even by Turner. One day a foolish visitor had called them "fluffy as baby angels' wings," and Robb had felt, ever since, like apologizing aloud to the painting for having opened the door. Loneliness: far more bearable. No Beethoven at all was better than Beethoven on a warped recording.

McNaughton had asked once, because sometimes he dared that sort of question, "How much of all this is Terrence? To you, I mean; to your appreciation? How much of all this is Terrence to you? And

how much a painter who makes the top of your head feel it's coming off?"

"Do I live among my memories, d'you mean? You're asking why I keep some of the early stuff up?"

McNaughton nodded.

Smiling: "I don't suppose there'd be a chance of convincing you—but, for me, being surrounded by Collin's pictures has no more of Terrence in it than it would for you."

"No, I'll believe you entirely. Just convince me."

"Let me see—how can I? Well, take it from this point: can you honestly believe that Terrence, the Terrence we used to know, say even six years ago, painted these pictures?"

McNaughton understood, after a moment, what was meant; he started to say, "Not a chance of it"; but refrained, realizing that over-emphatic agreement would only anger Robb unnecessarily. "I see what you mean. Yes. He's deceptive—there're two people in him, not even related." After a while, he added, "That must be an eerie sensation."

"Why so? How'd he even know there's anything different about it? That's what his whole idea of being alive would be, wouldn't it?"

"I didn't mean for him. I meant for you."

And Robb had looked down, caught—because the Terrence who painted was a giant one trembled at, but the Terrence who did not paint one still reminded gently, "You try being a bit more coherent, now, Terry," and, occasionally, "Terrence, if you can't read a murder mystery without biting your fingernails, don't read them."

"How arrogant he is!" McNaughton murmured, gesturing toward one of the most certain paintings. "How completely powerful and sure!" After a silence, he continued: "But you've still not made it clear to me, Nixon: why is it you keep up the bumbling beginnings?"

"I guess, mainly, because I teach, McNaughton, and this is growth. These are exactly—that. And if you don't love the phenomenon of growth, even the subintellectual phases of growth, let alone the artistic, you shouldn't teach."

"Ah—"

The word *growth* recalled, to both of them, the Terrence who did not paint. McNaughton: "Issues from the hand of Robb, the simple soul To a flat world of changing lights. . . . Eager to be reassured,

taking pleasure In the fragrant brilliance of the Christmas tree.
. . . Issues from the hand of Robb the simple soul? . . ."

Robb shrugged irritably. "No more than the other way around."

"Oh? You were formed—you were taught and nurtured?"

"Yes; certainly. Yes."

"Teaching is learning, Nixon? Healing is being made whole? Patience is profit—except for acquiring more patience? All the things you gave him you really think you received back in some way, mystical or otherwise?"

"McNaughton, sometimes you're unbearable."

Victoriously mournful, leaning his head back against the cushion of his chair: "And yet you'll go unsung. I, the only singer cognizant, would not dare sing you."

"Oh, shut up."

Because Robb couldn't bear for even McNaughton to understand all the beginnings of the healing and the teaching; part of it had been too painful.

A couple of months after Terrence had moved in with him—he'd come within a week of Mr. Morley's death—an excruciating conversation had occurred. Terrence had begun it, humble with gratitude. "I thank you so—so awfully much for—letting me in, Nixon!" Looking up from his easel one evening, and desperately sincere: "I really thank you from the bottom of my heart!"

"Avoid clichés." Robb picked up a novel.

"What I mean to say is: it's a good arrangement for me, but— isn't it *bothering*, you know, for you? You were—just alone, mostly? Even if I can't be the way—the last time was I guess about a year ago, wasn't it? when we— I could—*try*, I suppose, but I mean I don't see myself being like that again—"

Robb flipped through the pages of the novel.

"What I'm trying to say is, do you care if I'm here so much? Is it all right for you? Without—"

Robb read a phrase or two, wondering if self-discipline might not be, after all, the greatest virtue.

"You don't answer me. So maybe it's not good, at all, for you—" Then his tone had grown slightly frantic, "I'm sorry, but even if you said it wasn't O.K. with you, I think I'd just about *beg* to be let stay. I've just about *got* to be let stay. I didn't want to tell you, but I keep

having a nightmare where my father—he's quiet, not shouting or anything, but he keeps saying—he's bloody again—that I killed—Mr. Morley."

Robb laid the book down.

"And of course in a way I did." The crying, absent for days, returned; and the shaking.

"One more second of that and I'm going to throw a glass of ice water full in your face."

Five more seconds, and still the shaking. He'd slapped him: sharp, quick.

Then bravely again, not at all bragging despite the bragging words, "I could go just about any place, you know, Robb, I could keep the house in Berkeley and even have another house some place else and still travel."

"What in the name of God would you want with two houses?"

"I don't want any houses at all."

"Terry, let's take this a little at a time: you'd like to stay on here for a while?"

Silent earnest nodding.

"And you want to know how I feel about it? Whether it—'bothers' me?"

Nothing, not even nodding; just an intent inclination of the head, waiting.

Such quick fierce longing raged through Robb that he compared the question to asking a man half-dead with hanging if it would bother him to touch the earth. He made his voice casual, "Not at all. The last thing from it."

"Now that I'm—I mean, my God, you know I turned twenty-four the day Mr. Morley died, and you're— How old are you, Robb?"

But Robb discovered his control had made him suddenly so tired there seemed no point to anything, no reason for anything in life. "What the hell difference does it make how old I am?"

"I just meant that we're—well, we're just too old for—"

"Terry, can't you possibly arrange just please to shut up?" Startled at the misery so clear in his betraying voice, Robb apologized to himself, insisted he'd tried as hard for control this time as before. Still, his tone had certainly confessed him to be a man hanging, had cried yes, he wanted to touch ground; and he knew Terrence must have

heard it. Lightning-fast, the old longing not to be so, not to love so, cut through him—and was followed by the old thunder: that no change was possible.

He spoke distantly, judicially. "As I see it, you've all you can do, right now, just to get well, Terry. Just get yourself in hand completely, to where you'll have control of your nerves again. Why worry about anything else at all?"

Very quietly, in humbleness: "You think all I care about is myself, don't you, Robb? That all I've ever cared about in my life is me? You think I don't understand—don't *care*—that if it weren't for me, you and Dorothy would—get married, probably. You think it doesn't bother me."

There was nothing for it—for Robb's quick raging need to caress the curly hair and splendid face and to crush the pouting humble lips—but to take himself to the farthest corner of the room; and to close his eyes as if to rest them. He spoke slowly, expressionlessly: "Let's get it clear, then, once and for all. You're so important to me your welfare comes a thousand miles above everything else, above me and above Dorothy and above everything else in my life. Besides—you can even look at it this way and still be right: regardless even of how important you are to me, your painting would still be enough to make me practically your servant. You know how I feel about that: you're going to be—gigantic, someday. So if it helps you—right now—to stay here, you must. And don't worry about any other part of it. Now. That's clear enough, isn't it?"

Terrence merely sat still, one hand dangling from the arm of his chair.

Something about its perfection pricked Robb, stirred an acute resurgence of the desire just put down. He told himself he ought to encourage Terrence to be orthodox—and at almost the same instant told himself furiously he lied. He couldn't understand what he was supposed to say, what Terrence wanted of him. At last, he burst out in quiet incoherence, pitying himself, pitying Terrence, tormented that he should have to pity either one: "I don't mention it, I don't talk about it, because I know damned well there's probably nothing more horrible on earth than to be around someone who ador— who loves you, let's say, when you can't return that love. Man, woman, beast, it doesn't matter. I'd rather be around someone who hated

me, I think. So I *do* keep all that out of sight, don't I? How could I do any more?"

Terrence looked at him with an expression Robb always found unnerving: half-guilty, half-reproving, the way a handsome child who is being scolded unjustly might look. His eyes, his nose, his lips, in this expression, all were arrows that found Robb's vulnerability. "I was just trying to find out," Terrence mumbled, "if—well, all I was trying to do was ask aren't you, I mean weren't you, past it now too? Only I see now you're—"

Self-pity rose in a wave above Robb's head. He named it, but felt, all the same, he couldn't breathe through the weight of it. "Past it? *Past it?*" He picked up his book and hurled it across the room, and shouted, to change his misery to anger, "All I ask in this God damned *world* is for you not to despise something that's as much a part of me as my heart! Terrence, that's all I *ask*! It *really* isn't necessary to keep pointing out proudly that you're still too demon-ridden to be the way you're meant to be, instead of the way that bastard of a father of yours thought you should be! *Really*, it isn't! O.K.? Can we finish with it now?"

Flushed, Terrence croaked assent.

But they hadn't finished with it. They merely let the subject sleep.

Dorothy dropped by often, as if to help them lull it.

Terrence disdained her for her plainness, a fact somehow secretly amusing to Robb. Dorothy felt his sharp, critical gaze on her often, but forgave him everything: she thought Terrence potentially the greatest artist she'd ever met.

"I can't understand why you don't hold a showing of your work. Robb, shouldn't he?"

"He should. Mr. Morley and I told him so for years."

Invariably, Terrence changed the subject; he painted for himself.

Behind his back, Dorothy occasionally turned cross: "He has too much money. It's a pity."

Robb smiled, in an odd way pleased at her complete inability to understand Terrence. "He hasn't really, though. He doesn't know he's rich yet." He never discussed with her a quirk of Terrence's mind he found hilarious: Terrence, having come to live with him, seemed to think he'd reverted to his status of dependent. If the two

of them went to a movie, Robb paid. If they went out to dinner, Robb paid. Terrence made no offer to share the expenses of the little shack, yet automatically took over a good many of the household chores. He often told Robb that, with Mr. Morley gone, it was a great relief to be free of servants.

"But you never think of letting them go?"

Terrence looked up, shocked. "No! I couldn't do that: they'd have no place to go. I mean, they'd have to find new jobs. And they've been there so long they know how everything's supposed to be."

Supposed to be for whom? Robb wondered. Was Mr. Morley expected back? It delighted him, all the same, that Terrence could be so oblivious of his own wealth. "Don't you ever miss having nine-boy Indian curry whenever the whim seizes you? What about just having your bed made?"

"That damned Mrs. Good's the only one I ever even think of. Because she was always giving me trouble, even before Mr. Morley died. 'The young mahster-this,' and 'the young mahster-that,' and 'doesn't the mahster think it advisable?' She didn't want me to slip up on anything. Once she stole a coat I bought because she didn't like it. I went to the closet for it one day and it was gone. Nobody knew anything about it, oh, no!"

Robb chuckled. "You were fond of her, a little?"

"I don't know. I guess. But anyway, I could never not keep her."

"*Noblesse oblige?*"

"That reminds me. I've got to make out their checks."

In December Robb insisted that Terrence buy a fast little sports car: the lines were clean, the engine begged to be challenged, and, besides, it was ridiculous not to.

They drove to Berkeley for Christmas vacation, attended to business matters, paid homage to some of Terrence's possessions—the Romney, the Van Dyck, the Rubens. They swam in the heated pool. They drank far more than usual. But though the servants were respectful, the mansion itself seemed to be waiting for someone. For someone else. Robb wondered if Terrence felt it.

On the second night, he was answered: Terrence found his room.

Yet Robb understood he'd been only a refuge, not a haven. He was in no way surprised the next morning that Terrence was shy, reserved, preoccupied.

Later in the day Terrence insisted on going out to a bar. When he fell into urgent conversation with an uninhibited and unescorted young woman there, Robb saw immediately what had to happen next, but no matter how much he wanted to withdraw, he realized he must remain stoically in his place: the conquest would have no point unless he witnessed it.

Mercifully, the girl was quickly complaisant. Terrence excused himself casually, only a trifle apologetically; he'd take the girl home in a cab, Robb could have the car.

And in the morning, again the expected reaction: Terrence was self-confident, charming, almost witty. He spoke of the girl as "a ball of fire."

Yet he asked, in some way slighting to her rather than to Robb, "You don't mind?"

Robb answered that he didn't. He promised himself that, Terrence once again having shouted the word *manly* loud enough for his father to hear, perhaps they could be done with the dead man for a season.

It was in the following spring that the question of what to do about Dorothy began troubling him, for the first time seriously. •

That she'd been the invitational party to their affair, that she'd broken off with him—at a time when he'd been so excruciatingly in love with her—to return to her husband, and that she now seemed perfectly content with her status of divorcee, all acted as mitigants on any sense of guilt he might have about her, and he knew himself well enough to be sure that this wasn't merely rationalization. At the same time, her having been invitational, and—during those agonizing wifely years—unfaithful to him, didn't in any way lessen his respect for her. The need he had to deal decently with her sprang from comradeship, not from pity, and he knew it.

He granted that she loved him genuinely and was deeply in love with him; but then he reminded himself that she'd been in love before, passionately, extravagantly, and so could be again. Still, the severest charge always remained without defense: the unfairness of letting her give her love to him at all. It was her best love and it wasn't the love he wanted most.

He felt that he cheapened her, belittled her without her knowing it, and this hurt him, undermined his self-respect.

But neither could he find a way to break with her.

He couldn't start a quarrel and then walk out; they weren't quarrelers. He couldn't tell her he was tired of her for the same reason he couldn't strike her a blow in the face; nor was he tired of her; nor could she easily have believed him. He suggested to himself that he tell her the truth. And knew he could do that about as easily as he could confess to drinking the blood of little children. One of the things he'd always loved Dorothy for was her tolerance; yet he felt positive that the only alternative to horror she'd have to offer his admission of sexual ambivalence would be pity. To his own god, his conscience, he made no apology about his love for Terrence; he wasn't at all ashamed of it; he wore it—by now—as naturally as he wore his ears. Yet he'd not be pitied for it, not by Dorothy, any more than he'd be scorned for it by the world.

• “You brood. Do you know that, Robb darling?” With her voice as tender as her smile was wondering, “You do a fearful lot of brooding lately.”

His answer was to kiss her throat, to cup her breast. Guilt lay so heavily on him he might have been sentencing her to execution.

But the autumn of 1940 came, and then the winter, and still he couldn't find the answer.

As Terrence became more sure of himself—less afraid of the dark, of dreams, of his fathers—Robb commanded him to travel (in the United States only, since war already raged in Europe), and he was gone for weeks, sometimes for months. Journey by journey, he grew more and more persuaded that his wealth was really his. Less and less was he astonished that nearly half the women, and perhaps a twentieth of the men, whom he met on his travels, not only saw him covetously but took pains to let him see how they felt. Gradually—and at the first decidedly to his own surprise—it began to seem not unnatural to him to respond to men as well as to women. When at last he grew sympathetic to other people's passion, instead of half-appalled at the intensity of it, he even saw desire as a kind of bridge between him and the world. He satisfied other people's longings often enough not to be concerned that he had none of his own.

Occasionally he suffered the reaction he'd been brought up to think was decent, proper, respectable. “My God,” he reported to Robb in a shocked tone, “people are loose about things—sex, and so on—these days!”

When Robb smiled, it was without jealousy; before Terrence could choose him, really choose him, he had to know what he was choosing from.

But if he dreamed of Terrence grown experienced, each new experience nevertheless had the power to frighten him. "This girl—the model in Seattle—was she really so beautiful?" And, "That pilot you met in Chicago—you'll see him again?"

All the same, he was careful to display only the minimum of interest: if such episodes were to be granted importance, Terrence might easily be shunted back to the morality of Mr. Collin. Besides, jealousy bred coquettes, and all the sickening silly viciousness of coquettes.

"Sometimes I feel jealous of Terrence," Dorothy said once, alarming him.

"How so?"

"You're always thinking about him—about what's good for him, is he sitting in a draft with his feet wet, what he could do with a rusted automobile in some wheat field under a Turner sky we happen to pass, and when you see a toothless beggar grinning you wish Terrence could see him—you're so protective and concerned about him, Robb. Of course I know it's mainly because he's such an artist, if not entirely because he's such an artist. Still, he is important to you, in your thoughts. More important than you are to yourself, I sometimes think. So I—"

"But—you're that way about him too."

"True. I can see myself giving him my last crust of bread and saying, 'Damn you, paint!' But anyway, sometimes I feel jealous, as if you should be thinking about somebody else that way. A child, if you had a child, say."

He looked at her, not breathing.

"Oh, don't be silly," she laughed. "This isn't a proposal. No, it's just that I think you should be giving all that to somebody who's either warmer or less—less gifted, I guess. Less gifted with money and, mainly, with that staggering talent."

"But," slowly, "his money isn't anything at all to him, you know that. And you yourself just finished saying it's largely *because* of his *having* 'that staggering talent.' " But the word that kept poking at his mind, asking to be explained, was *warmer*.

Finally, he muttered it. " 'Warmer?' "

She looked at him oddly. "Yes, of course; warmer."

He felt the muscles of his throat grow tight, as if with dread. "How d'you mean?"

"I used to think he was a narcissist, or however you say it, but I saw that was wrong, finally."

Somewhat relieved: "Oh no, he isn't that at all."

"No, he isn't. He isn't even that. He's really only about half a person. He's just the taking part of a person."

He wanted to feel angry, but her voice was so calm, so completely free of malice, and, as always, so perfectly beautiful, that he could not. He replied rationally, "Yet, I dare say, Dorothy, he'll end by giving the world more than you and I would give it if we'd fifty lifetimes."

"Oh, I don't dispute that. But what he gives—and I definitely agree with you he'll probably give it—is something he gives only accidentally. He just lets people look over his shoulder, Robb. Though the view, I admit, is astonishing. But when you paint the toothless grinning beggar I was talking about, for example, you somehow give the beggar something—personally—that makes him know he's a human being and it's not too awful being human, after all. But when Terrence paints a beggar, the beggar is just what he was before, or a little bit less. One more time, he's been used—and used so thoroughly (the way Terrence does) he may even see he's wearing out. That's what I mean: Terrence is a taker."

"But his beggar will be more powerful than my beggar. His beggar will be able to evoke more compassion than mine! His beggar will be more alive—you'll be able to come back and read his beggar a *hundred* times more often than you can come back and look at mine without getting bored!"

"Oh, yes. Yes. He takes splendidly."

"I mean something has to happen between Terrence and the beggar for that to be so!"

"Why, Robb, you know perfectly well that isn't true." After a while, looking at his stubborn chin, she went on. "Utrillo painting his street scenes to get a little absinthe, remember that for example? Cézanne cursing his flowers for wilting? And who was it—one of the medieval boys—torturing prisoners to help with ideas for Crucifixion scenes? Why, Robb."

He was furious, not at being bested, but for being unable to de-

fend Terrence successfully. "He's not a sentimentalist, of course," he said—so icily it was almost as if he had said, "Can't you see I've finished being in love with you?"

She stared at him strangely. She was quiet the rest of their visit. Her mind kept stumbling from hurt to wonder, and back again, like a child learning to walk between rough teachers, and he watched it stumble, hating his own cruelty but unrelenting.

When he'd passed the point of not respecting himself on her account, and indeed had almost reached the point of despising himself on her account, Dorothy suddenly relieved him of his dilemma. She resigned her professorship of Art at Whittier and went to Texas: she'd learned to fly in the Civil Aeronautics Administration's courses, and now she took the job of ferrying planes from Wichita, Kansas, to various air bases in Texas.

Their affair continued with no question of its not continuing; she returned to be with him whenever she could. But she was somehow changed, shrunk or grown, but clearly changed in a way that displaced him as the center of her life. She seemed to have no idea of wanting more than he meant to give, a fact he saw with relief. At the same time, he experienced the slightest, most unreasonable annoyance. He permitted himself to think, once or twice, with bitterness, that he was no more than a convenience.

He had never been critical of her, nor was he now, but the changes which began taking place in her were of such a magnitude he found himself studying her—during her brief visits—as he might study someone newly met. She began using popular wartime slang that struck him as distasteful and alien on her tongue: "Sweating it out for my favorite uncle," "Don't rev up your engine," and "Straighten up and fly right!" She took to wearing her hair in a new style, shorter than before, with less flattering softness. She'd never been careful about clothes before; now she was meticulous about her uniform. She became incalculably more interested in politics and current affairs than she'd been. As it did with so many, the war succeeded in turning her a fiery patriotic shade.

"You care more about the world at large—and perhaps even less about yourself than you used to," he offered once.

"Yes, I guess I do, at that," she answered in her soft voice—but with a peculiar expression that implied more than was contained in

the words. And, "That's wise, isn't it? Wouldn't you say that's wise?"

She cared more about the big frenzied impersonal world and its doings, and less about herself simply because—so he saw it—he'd shown her she was unimportant. If he had loved her completely, she'd have gone on loving herself contentedly, granting herself importance second only to him—an insight he angrily rejected a moment after it occurred to him. He hadn't asked, had he, even at the beginning, for the responsibility of her? He thought her glance said he had, and he contradicted the idea with vigorous silence.

Four months after Pearl Harbor, she joined the WAAC's and was sent to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia.

Terrence and she were granted their Army commissions at about the same time, and Robb settled in earnest to his term of loneliness.

Occasionally he rode by train to Berkeley to see his family. Beginning to age rather rapidly, Mr. and Mrs. Nixon reached out toward him almost pathetically. For the first time ever, they needed him: services ordinarily obtainable being out of the question now, they had to wait, if a tree must be trimmed or a broken windowpane replaced, for Robb's next visit. "You're a good son," his father seemed to say. "We're not embarrassed by you any more. Please forget we used to be." In indescribably subtle ways, his mother made him the most important person in the house.

The situation wasn't to his liking. Their approval had no savor for him now, and he couldn't stop their dying. They reached out for his warmth, wanting to cling to life through him. But he felt that the love he had for them was only conventional, almost impersonal. He listened respectfully while his father reminisced about World War I. He dried the dishes for his mother. But when they pressed nearer, wanting more, his reaction was chagrin: it seemed unfair to him that they should demand now what had been for so long unneeded.

Betty's house, in San Francisco, came more and more to represent a haven during these trips.

Trot, having astonished everyone by joining the Navy immediately after Pearl Harbor, had become a Lieutenant Commander by the end of '44 and was almost never stationed near home. With some right to the title, Betty called herself a widow. And her children—a girl having been born two or three years after the boy—accepted Robb as a sort

of second father. His word could settle disputes instantly, and they begged to be given glasses like his. He felt more than welcome there: Betty's delight at seeing him was almost touching.

Surprisingly, the years had brought them closest friendship. It seemed there was almost nothing they couldn't discuss together now. The veneer she'd acquired like a dress for her late twenties had been discarded by the thirties, outgrown as completely as the kittenishness of her youth. She'd become at last who she really was, and he liked her very much.

Sometimes Robb even wondered if she might understand him completely. Dorothy, infuriating him to speechlessness, had worried aloud at the time of Terrence's enlistment that he might turn out to be more of an asset to the Axis than to the Allies. But even at that time Betty had already grown extremely sympathetic to Terrence: "When I think of him being shouted at by sergeants for not peeling the potatoes right, I get so mad I could choke. One thousand million people can peel potatoes!" And she managed to treat Terrence exactly like a brother, an attitude most women found impossible to approach with him. Perhaps most admirable of all, she seemed even to have forgiven him his wealth, quite as if she'd forgotten it was once almost hers.

Sometimes Robb thought she had. But that remained one of their few taboos—George, the house of Morley, the pain of that time. The only clue she gave that the lost love still hurt cuttingly lay in her hatred, her almost fanatic passion, against everything connected with communism.

On Valentine's Day she wired Robb that he must come to her immediately. She'd opened the door a moment before to two messengers: one bearing flowers Trot had arranged for, the other a telegram making her a widow in fact.

He held her tenderly while she wept. Though her tears seemed endless, he didn't urge her to cut them off; he knew they were an explanation, an apology—to Trot.

When he heard from Johnny that George was in England, he began writing to him, though he wouldn't mention him to Betty. He saw the two of them as together indissolubly—not in any mystical way, not because he knew George had been the only love in her life;

instead, he felt it because of what he discovered in the growth of her son. He'd gladly have seen them together in actuality.

But George's letters put him off. George was his own age, but still, apparently, must beat his head bloody against the walls of life's imprisonment.

During yesterday's visiting hours, a ruddy-checked, blue-eyed minister had twinkled at Virgil benevolently as he sat opposite him across the wide table San Quentin's rules kept between them. A garrulous little man, he'd talked on and on, often a trifle incoherently; sometimes he stammered slightly, not as if he were troubled by certain syllables so much as if he were trying to emphasize them.

Virgil had listened to him with sharp attention, never once taking his eyes from the smiling face.

The minister's old-fashioned, gold rimmed glasses had sparkled in cleanliness; his collar shone, almost enameled with starch. "The Googen—ah, the Googens'—garden will provide a most excellent setting for our little prayer meeting this weekend. It's such an authentic—authentically—beautiful background, one of the old gen—*genuine*—mansions, such a lovely green yard. I wonder if you happen to be familiar with it, or at least the area it's in? Bon Marche Avenue. The eighteen—*eighteen*—hundred block. As valuable an old place as is in the eighteen hundred block, or perhaps even all the way up Bon Marche through the twenty-five hundred block. Are you at all familiar with it, that area? I wish our little gathering might be postponed till the weather turns warmer, but it's a question of taking advantage of this opportunity *now* or letting it slip altogether. Certainly other church groups would be glad to—*snatch* the opportunity." He smiled up at the guard standing nearby, but the guard was absorbed in studying one of the women visitors, evidently a very successful prostitute. So the minister droned on, describing the Googens' garden in particular detail. Virgil nodded, indicating he knew the place well. So far everything was clear: a genuine Gauguin was being offered for a mere eighteen hundred dollars. Howie the cleric thought it would make a smart bargain even at twenty-five hundred dollars. The gar-

den's description was actually a description of the particular painting itself. Virgil recognized the work: a Gauguin as real as rain, with its blue-shadowed trees boldly Veronese green, with something hot as lust about it, shameless as lust, and with all the shoulders broken. But if one were going to buy it, Howie said, one must act quickly. So far he'd been able to keep the owners to himself, no other bidders competing, but such a situation couldn't possibly obtain much longer.

"And it occurred to me that you—you might be interested in writing up the story of your fall from grace and your subsequent salvation, so I could read it to our group. It couldn't harm you—such a little thing it would be to do, for you—and you could be sure it would do good." *I'll invest eighteen hundred dollars of your money in it, if you'd like. Eighteen hundred dollars isn't any great sum to you, and you can't possibly go wrong on this.*

"No, Reverend, no. I think not."

"But, Virgil, why ever not? Oh, such gran—*grand* people will be there: you know five or six of them. Wood—Woodard and his wife Bea—Beatrice—and their lovely daughter Worth. Oh, and who else? Such nice people! I forget now, but I was counting them on the way here and they're such *grand* people and I was sure you'd met at least five of them. It's the sort of investment—investing a little of our time in others' welfare—you'll never regret later." *Why not? You could be sure of getting five or possibly six thousand for it later, if its sale was handled properly.*

A shabby woman, visiting her husband just next them, had suddenly mourned, "I'm so ashamed!"

"Certainly five," murmuring indistinctly, eying the guard. When Virgil shook his head again, Howie's expression made it clear he was annoyed at such obstinacy.

They knew each other very well: Virgil had painted many things for him and expected to paint many more upon being released. They trusted each other as much as most respectable business partners, both understanding what folly any other course would be. The cleric had at least fifteen thousand dollars of Virgil's money in safekeeping, but Virgil felt no qualms about it, aware that Howie considered him capable of earning them ten, perhaps twenty times that amount.

They were very different people, and yet this attitude of Virgil's

concerning the Gauguin was indicative of a difference between them that made all the other differences almost similarities. He was saying he would not have the Gauguin in his apartment, whether it sold for five thousand dollars or eighteen cents. He didn't dispute the worth of it, artistically or moneywise; he even appreciated it; he almost respected it. But Gauguin said nothing to him: he talked a foreign language or about subjects boringly unknown, unreal. Gauguin danced with plum-colored boncless feet on purple earth, and when he was tired he flopped down gasping and picked his nose. Gauguin was not to be allowed in Virgil's living room, or bedroom, or even his bath.

"It occurs to me," the cleric had once proposed long ago, before prison, "that you've actually some sort of moral scruple against considering paintings as investments!" His tone had been frankly shocked.

"Not at all. Not in the least," Virgil had laughed, supremely above clarifying his mind to Howie, "especially when they're my Van Dycks." His first Van Dyck had brought the gavel down at twenty thousand—leaving about nine clear to be divided between the two of them, and it had never attracted a whisper of suspicion: Howie could only shut his mouth.

Today, working in the prison tobacco plant, Virgil remembered both conversations. He smiled, granting that yes, only someone deeply prejudiced, only a snob, could possibly have turned down the Gauguin. And the cleric had left him with another chance: if he'd write a brief account of his fall and salvation and mail it within the next forty-eight hours, it might not be too late. Virgil touched a button, started the redrying machine he'd finished loading with tobacco. He'd not change his mind.

The greatest trouble with prison, he reflected, was its being so unlike what the rational mind might expect. If a man were counting on humiliation, longing to be purged in his own blood so that he might go forth and sin again, refreshed, prison was not at all the place for it.

The depths he'd been envisioning seemed to have been shored up carefully, leveled. Everything he'd expected—the shaved heads, the striped numbered shirts, the continual enforced silence, the sadistic guards, the complete lack of recreation—turned out to belong to the

movies exclusively, or to some other establishment. By being sent to San Quentin, he'd had the misfortune of falling into the hands of Warden Duffy, a man who was going to rehabilitate him or bust.

When they'd finally caught him (on a pretty little Renoir, and not at all because of a mistake in technique, but just because of an error in judgment—trusting an authenticator who later got the guilties), he'd looked forward to the sentence; it was to be an obliterating of self, a purification through withdrawal from the contemporary. And it had turned out—a bell rang; they stopped their machines; arranged themselves in line for the mess hall—prison had turned out to be so different from what he'd expected. He remembered to this day, over a year later, how quickly he'd become aware of a myriad sly exasperating techniques directed against his plan. He'd found it utterly impossible to feel as estranged from society as he wished. He was called an inmate rather than a convict, was encouraged to read newspapers, listen to the radio, correspond with friends, see movies. Guns were rarely visible. No dungeons, no floggings, no water cures. Nor had one been led to expect recreation halls.

The first two months he'd been there, he'd been kept with the new men. Psychologists had questioned him earnestly. (He'd known enough to create precisely what impressions were desired.) He'd been invited to join the Seekers' Club, to study the causes of crime. (He'd declined.) He'd been requested to take over a night school class, to teach drawing; so as not to seem boorish, he'd accepted this assignment. (It had caused him his only real pain.) But when he was asked to paint murals for the San Quentin Canteen, he'd refused adamantly. (No punishment obtained, psychologists explaining his reluctance.) After the first two months, he'd been given this not unpleasant job, processing tobacco.

And a final disappointment had come from the other convicts. Properly, they should have made his life a hell. But as soon as they discovered him to be neither a fool nor a whimperer nor a preacher, they'd begun treating him with respect. Not a shadow of opprobrium attached itself to his crime. (Child molesters and conscientious objectors were granted all the hell.) Exasperatingly, it seemed to delight everyone—guards and convicts alike—that his Renoir had commanded so much money. They called him Michelangelo (since they already had a Rembrandt), but not jeeringly. He was a mystery to

them; he couldn't help seeing how proud they were of him. They advised him frequently as to what steps he should take to be released to the Army for camouflage work.

He was put in a cell with a doctor who'd been convicted of statutory rape (his mistress loved him while she was sixteen, but got religion when seventeen). The doctor read a great deal of Goethe and Ibsen and Shakespeare and Samuel Butler and Chaucer. He pointed out to Virgil the chronic benzedrine drinkers in the place; he himself resorted to an occasional release with morphine, smuggled to him in gift stationery, well saturated. The cell having been designed for one man, the doctor took great pains never to be irritating. Regretting bitterly that he'd not drawn a thug, Virgil automatically followed suit. Occasionally, they killed each other politely at chess.

Virgil had hoped, during the trial, to find in prison a stimulus for even greater effort, a stimulus that would provide him with incentive and perfect caution the rest of his life. He knew the spur he needed must be almost unendurably sharp: his goal was to duplicate the works, or at least the styles, of more great artists than had ever been attempted by a single man before. The term in prison was to have provided a final searing of the egotism which sometimes prevented him from assuming completely not just the technique but even the mentality of whatever artist he was plagiarizing. In prison, the old Virgil Benthwick was to be irretrievably lost. A guard's fist was to strike him in the face, again and again; and at the twentieth blow, or the fiftieth, or at some moment of a suffering breath in the stench of dungeons, the old Virgil Benthwick was to die. And that which should be left—so he'd promised himself—was to be a very saint for selflessness.

But since the trial he'd learned with rage that he'd been childishly romantic. His frustration was acute. Sometimes, contemplating a move in chess, he thought wryly that he might almost as well have served a term as a shoe salesman.

Nor did his friends turn against him: another unexpected annoyance. He'd imagined that McNaughton, of course, would value the idea as he did, if it were explained. But, painfully loyal to his goal, he'd not explained it, wanting severance even here. And McNaughton, at that, had come uncomfortably close to understanding anyway.

On his first visit: "Benthwick, were you listening when that pom-

posity of a lawyer suggested Renoir was your only kettle of fish? Bless us every one, he might at least have stretched it to include Fragonard."

Virgil had uneasily indicated the guard.

Covertly, McNaughton had investigated the man's face; murmured, "An innocent."

"I finally found out what that joke is about, the one about the laundry. It seems the laundry assignments are reserved for homosexuals, exclusively."

"Oh? Quaint. Or even Watteau. He might have had the courtesy to throw in Watteau."

It was all Virgil could do not to look at him sharply, suspiciously. He'd not had too much trouble with Watteau.

"If I could hold a brush," McNaughton had observed musingly, as if to himself, "I'd like to try Van Gogh and then Grant Wood. For exercise."

"Impossible. Absurd."

"Of course. Just like the man said."

The man, the attorney, had said a forger was a timid painter, a tenth-rater who always happened to paint, anyway, something like the artist he forged. No forger ever practiced much after he'd been once convicted: everyone knew too well the way he squeaked. Listening, Virgil had almost trembled with pride. He'd bowed his head; because if they had one of his Renoirs, that was all they had. Both Van Dycks still hung proud, his Chardin remained beloved, and his early Constable had just the day before been purchased by the Governor's wife. If he'd bit his lip and looked humbly toward the judge, his heart had pounded passionately for his uniqueness. When the wizard McNaughton had tried to catch his eye, he'd denied the advance; this triumph was to be his alone, it wasn't to be shared even after he was dead. He'd decided on that much long ago, and hadn't changed his mind.

A bell rang. The twenty minutes for eating had gone. The men rose. Not a scrap of food remained on a single plate. It was the rule: you ate what you were given. Still, the food was ridiculously edible. Now they would have a quick little walk in the fresh air. Oscar Wilde had begged to see the sun.

In the yard, the rumor went that a whole new set of volley-ball equipment was on its way to them, a gift from Mae West.

It was announced over the intercom that Mrs. Roosevelt was coming to talk to them. Very well. He supposed this too could be endured. When the man next him muttered bitterly that he understood she charged a fee, Virgil politely answered that it hardly seemed fair, for such a captive audience. He heard his little joke going down the lines, ahead of and behind him. And there was nothing he could do about that, either: he was considered witty.

A young guard he'd not seen before passed him, mounted to assume duty at the tower station. Virgil stared curiously. There was something familiar. He saw with a slight shock that the young man resembled himself, could almost have been himself, say perhaps eight or nine years ago. And the fellow deported himself with great dignity too, his expression proud and earnest and serious. He still believed in all the proper rules, certainly he did.

Idly, Virgil asked himself: assuming the young man to be someone whose welfare he was interested in, and supposing the matter of whether or not the chap should go on believing in the rules were left to him to decide with a simple yes or no, which would be his choice?

After a few minutes' reflection, he answered gladly—glad for himself, realizing it meant he harbored no regret—*no*. Because as soon as the standard rules, the set imposed on you, had been abandoned, how infinitely fascinating and exciting all life became! Though of course it was imperative that the old code be replaced immediately with one of your own and that this replacement be adhered to rigidly. Otherwise, death of mind and spirit obviously awaited you; you'd become a slug.

He tried to remember at what moment it had happened, the decision to travel on his own road. Of course he hadn't recognized it, not at the precise instant of its occurrence. A bit now, a trifle more the next day, the understanding had accumulated itself. Perhaps it had been at that blindingly cruel moment in Mr. Morley's library. Terrence, stammering it out hesitantly: "Yes, too imitative. . . . That was your only fault."

More probably it had been at the instant when he'd grasped certainly what the wealthy Jew was after—Abraham's friend who'd

admired, no, who'd lusted after the Rembrandt-like portrait he'd done of Abraham. Now, *there* was an eccentric taste for you! What the man had wanted, though he'd found it so blushingly hard to confess, was a portrait precisely like Rembrandt's work, even to the materials used, even to the point of artificial aging. But he'd wanted it to be a portrait of himself: he was coming, as close as possible, to sitting for Rembrandt. There'd been no idea of forgery, or of resale. The man wanted the portrait for his private study; only his family or closest friends were ever to see it, and it was to be destroyed upon his death. A neurotic compulsion extremely profitable to Virgil, who had only to sign a statement promising never again to perform such a service for any other patron, and then hold out his hand for a staggering payment. Even though Abraham had advised him earlier to expect a Rembrandt price, he'd not been able to believe such madness.

Immediately, he'd packed the Sire off to a first-rate rest home. He'd parted with a whopping sum; and had been glad to, because so much was guaranteed: the Sire was there for life, his tea to be steeped five—not seven—minutes, for all that life.

It must have been then that his own lust was born, though for so long afterward it remained unnamed, hiding in darkness, and so far from being understood.

First, the school of Rubens; an experiment, merely. Preposterously simple, he'd found it, the school of Rubens. Flesh looking as though it had been caressed just moments before, and an annulet of pearls, glowing with reflected life. No great struggle, that; yet he couldn't help being a bit proud of it. He'd looked forward to experiencing some little thrill, perhaps, upon showing it to McNaughton, that was about all.

But Abraham had happened to see it first, and—but *had* that been chance? He'd *happened* to see it first? Impossible to know positively, but certainly it had seemed so then. Nothing had been deliberately arranged.

At any rate, there'd never been any showing it to McNaughton at all. Abraham, choking something down—Abraham, thickly: "Virgil, I want this. Virgil, I will pay. . . ."

And then his own lust coming to power, bursting into open light, lust more urgent by a hundred times than ever had been his hottest

need for a woman. Even yet he was unable to understand it completely—though he could feel it within himself: a tower of raging pride.

If he'd despised who he was, had always despised—without ever knowing why—who he was, now he could be a part of the great ones he'd always loved. Rubens: for the next experiment he had elected to be the master Rubens himself! He would be, someday (it was conceivable, or not impossible; for who could say what might not be possible, someday?) *he* would be Hobbema, in a dusty quiet landscape; Tintoretto, with a lion's roar of color. He had decided to dare and dare and dare.

Another bell sounded. Returned to his place of work, he smiled reassuringly at the frightened incompetent who operated the tobacco shredder, and muttered a sentence or two of direction to him. A fumbling amateur burglar, who'd tremblingly let his gun go off one night and killed a man. Pathetic.

At last Abraham had seemed to sicken of him. "I can not understand you, Virgil. You have no reason—you have not *my* reason, at least. I cannot understand it. Money, can it be money, with you? That slimey little priest-like creature I introduced you to— Surely *he* could not provide you with a reason? Because even the risk alone would make the money seem small, to me, by comparison."

But Virgil remembered he'd been far from explaining. Pride had become like a god to him by then. He'd welcomed Abraham's scorn and broken with him gladly.

The intercom delivered a little pep talk about war bonds. "We're doing good. Let's do better," urged a strong cheerful voice.

It seemed preposterous to him they'd put him here for an offense concerning money. Money had so little to do with it. Merely the necessary symbol: if he weren't paid, and paid handsomely, he'd dwindle to the size of a boy parading in costume before a mirror. But, otherwise, money was not even secondary, it was nothing to him.

He wondered whether he ought to send Howie that account of sin and salvation after all. Indifference to money had already made the cleric accuse him once or twice before of having "a twisted intellect," and certainly there was no point in destroying your partner's confidence in you. The man had invaluable contacts: announcement

of the last work done before prison, a warm and charming Romney, was expected to arrive from England at any moment. A nobleman, exhausted by wartime taxes, had been arranged for. His surprise would be extremely dramatic and convincing, when he discovered it in his ancestral mansion.

Virgil chuckled. What delighted ravings there were sure to be: an unlisted Romney!

Irritably, McNaughton pushed the Sunday morning newspaper away. He'd turned to the art section and had been disgusted: imagine some idiot not knowing he owned a Romney! How many attics and closets and basements could there be in a place?

His own luck always stopped at unearthing mouldy old hymn-books. He sighed. Well, well.

He poured a substantial amount of vodka into his morning tomato juice, but, even as he poured, recognized the futility of what he did. Drink was no anodyne for what was coming.

The prospective agony of this afternoon—the tea they'd have this afternoon—was enough, he estimated silently, not only to make one wish to be dead, but even enough to make one wish to be dead and safely buried at Forest Lawn.

It might be a trifle inconvenient, getting one's corpse into Forest Lawn, because the demand for space there was reported to be impressive and, besides, the place itself was pretty far away (since of course it had to be close to its cousin, Hollywood), but the approaching afternoon made it, even so, seem worth the trouble.

Because surely, he reasoned carefully, there could be no place safer than Forest Lawn; it might even be so safe that just making arrangements to lie there, before the time of being classified as dead, could make a person safe. Such arrangements would constitute, *per se*, humble admission that one had been conquered, conquered completely; all need for further torture might be obviated automatically.

He sipped; told himself he should have been married there as well, as some people actually were. Sipped again; and told himself he didn't deserve such sanctuary.

The afternoon's plan was to drive first—Iva and he—to pick up

the shrill whining porpoise, her mother, and then to cut across town to pick up that pathetic patient thing, his mother, and then to drive to that quasi-hotel establishment that was really just an elegant old folks' home (and, before getting out of the car, to receive and give reminders not to let it slip that Virgil wasn't a prisoner of war but instead just a prisoner), and then to sit around little tables in the most hysterically cheerful sort of parlor imaginable and to absorb—absorb so delicately it couldn't be called eating and drinking—tarts and tea; and to talk. To talk in such a way the talkers were to try to seem inferior to their host the Sire in exact ratio to the degree they felt superior to him.

He'd been a tyrant; McNaughton granted he'd even been ruinous to the very soul of his son, but nevertheless the Sire had been a man. He'd owned a brain. A shrewd and subtle brain. He'd commanded power: he'd made McNaughton respect him, with hating, but, still, respect him. He had not once been fooled by shams. He had not accepted the second best, ever, in anything. He hadn't, after all, compromised; and in so much he was alone among all the people McNaughton had ever known. To watch them sit around him now—these three dreadful harpies without a brain or a virtue among them—to let them sit around him now and stare and simper and goggle and giggle and condescend seemed cruel sport indeed.

The old blind eagle, shackled,
Is visited,
Not set upon
Visited not set upon,
By courteous cats.

He'd thought a poem, he told himself, and went to put it down. Then he stared at it angrily: was it a poem or an exercise in typing? He continued:

Three courteous cats
Dressed in sleek gentility
Come to lick his blood,
But not to tear his flesh,
To taste his blood but not to rend his flesh:
For thus he'll last another day.

There was something excruciating about Sundays; he'd never yet been able to write a passable poem on a Sunday. "Father, dear

Father, come home with me now,' " he muttered, and cursed himself for having been the minister's child. He jerked the thing out of the typewriter, wadded it and threw it into the wastebasket.

His nose tricked him into thinking a young girl had come into the room—but, turning, he saw it was only Iva again, heralded by that preposterous cologne she favored.

"Got that stuff out again, have you?"

"What stuff, dear?"

He wouldn't answer. She knew perfectly well what he meant: he'd often told her he loathed it. After every time he told her, she denied herself the pleasure of it for a fortnight. Then got it out again, dabbed it here and there on herself so that whenever she moved, little banners of fragrance streamed in her wake, proclaiming her a virgin of sixteen who wore pink panties with white lace doggies on their sides. He told himself it was much easier not to look at people than it was not to smell them. But he wasn't beaten: he drew out his pipe and lighted it; he'd disinfect her, as much as he could, with tobacco.

"That awful smelly old pipe! I'm going to hide it some day," she complained happily. It was her way of telling herself she was married, she'd caught one after all, she could train him, and he couldn't get away. "I'd think at least you could keep it clean." She congratulated herself on power past: if he were still in her department at the library, his pipe would be clean.

McNaughton heard her private conversation and stared at her, commenting to himself, with silence and passion, that she was as immaculately free of mercy as anyone he'd ever known.

She held a small scribbled box in her hand. "Isn't this a pretty package, dear? I wrapped it myself."

"What is it?"

"Mints for the old gentleman."

"Don't call him the old gentleman."

"How did he ever come to be called anything so ridiculous as the Sire?"

"He is the Sire."

"You don't call him that to his face, do you?"

"Of course we don't call him that to his face."

"Does he know you call him that behind his back?"

"Of course he doesn't know we call him that behind his back."

"I'm going to tell him. He'll think it's cute. All these years, and he's never known. It will give him a smile."

"I've been thinking it might be a good idea to kill you, anyway, Iva, and if you tell him that I'll know I was right."

Her giggle matched her cologne. "I don't know how you can think of the things you say."

"Never mind. You heard me."

She looked at him fondly. He could tell she was thinking he was a genius. He went to the bathroom to take one of his yellow pills—supposedly they relaxed the muscles. She wrote articles for library publications about the wives of the literary great: the loving Mesdames Dostoevski, Conrad and Galsworthy were her favorites, but for contrast she sometimes liked to upbraid the Mrs. Matthew Arnold sort. He knew positively she thought along these lines quite regularly during their somewhat spastic exercises in sex. An attack of vertigo seized him as he gulped down the pill. He swallowed a little water, and washed down next a white pill: supposedly it built up one's nerves.

He returned to the typewriter—Sunday be damned—and noticed gratefully she'd left the room. Perhaps the typewriter was the wrong tool just now; he took out a fountain pen. For some reason suspicion prompted him to look into the wastebasket. Then violent soft curses: it was empty. She'd done it again, she'd taken the poem he'd thrown away. Even if he tore them into ribbons, she took them. Glued them together, patched them together—and if a line were totally obliterated, she'd just write in her own, he had no doubt of it; she'd unhesitatingly change words about, substitute whole lines. He closed his eyes, putting her in hell, and mumbled to all his pitiless laughing gods, "She has no honor. She hasn't the honor or understanding of a bitch in heat."

When he'd first discovered what her trick was, he'd begged, "Iva, dear Iva, don't you see: when I throw a poem away, I want it thrown away? It means I don't think it's good. It's my poem, it has my name on it, and if I don't like it, it's not only my privilege, in a way it's even my duty, to destroy it. You mustn't try to save things I've condemned. You mustn't—ever—pick up something I've thrown away. Don't you see that?"

She'd been coy. She'd read something about some of Schubert's songs being picked up off the floor by his friends; and Dowson's poems lost when the tablecloth was washed—she knew that story too.

Firmly correcting her: "No, dear, they were both careless people and—what shall I say? inspirational artists. I'm not at all like that. I'm not only careful, I'm meticulous. I just happen to operate that way. If I have one merit, it's precision. It mightn't be wrong, ethically, to save a sketch Picasso had dashed off and thrown away, because he's a hot sort of artist. But it would be absolutely criminal to try to 'rescue' a painting by Mondrian, even if he thought only one line was wrong. Don't you see the difference?"

Yes, now she saw it, she'd said, promising never to do such a thing again.

But of course she did.

It was so clear what her plan was: to outlive him, and then to bring out a book of scraps, abortions. She'd lecture to local women's clubs about him, he knew it. Supposing he made a bit more of a name, she might quite shamelessly set about dissecting him while he was still alive. There'd be no way of stopping her. Tears of rage welled behind his eyes. He wanted to apologize ahead of time to the few people who really liked his poetry—some way had to be found to warn them of what was being plotted.

He grew so desperate that he thought he must try again to explain it to her. He went to her and began in a soft, almost pleading voice, "Iva—"

She turned to him, her eyes flashing; she'd been crying. "I should think you *would* be sorry!"

He stared, dumfounded.

"How dare you write a thing like that? How *could* you? 'Courteous cats!' You meant us, didn't you, our mothers and me? And Mr. Benthwick's a 'blind eagle' because he doesn't know Virgil's in prison, your great friend Virgil? 'Taste his blood but will not eat his flesh For thus he'll last another day!' How *could* you?" She sobbed. She was evidently genuinely hurt. "I've been nothing but nice to that old man. Mother and I—and your mother, too—have gone out of our way to be nice to him!"

And he, in the same soft pleading voice: "Please, Iva, please bury me at Forest Lawn."

Ordinarily she thought non sequitur a certain sign of genius, and hesitated for a moment even now. But the *courteous cats* clawed too much. She looked him squarely in the eye and asked cruelly, "Do you imagine for one moment that we *like* giving up a whole Sunday afternoon just to go visit a common convict's father?"

He stared at her for a long time.

"No," he said calmly, "come to think of it, I can't say I do imagine so."

Packing, he felt almost exuberant. Waiting for the taxi (it seemed only barely honorable to leave her their car), he celebrated, with a glass of vodka straight, her kindness in releasing him.

When she found out what he was doing, she began to moan—up and down the scale with little bursts alternating against larger expositions, began to beg and upbraid, all four sets of ticking muscles going; but he persevered in regarding her impersonally—as a mistake he'd made a long time ago. She'd got him by weeping, he remembered; she'd not get him back by weeping.

Against future pity, he scribbled on a card the date and this notation: *Called VB convict*, and shut it inside his Browning. Decided Browning ought not be bothered; took it out, gave it instead to Jeffers' *Roan Stallion*. And chuckled for his wit, happier than in years.

After the letter had gone out to Robb, George began to worry. For the first time in years, he felt concern for what someone might think of him. What a half-witted thing to have done! Why in God's name had he imagined Robb would want to be bothered with his problems?

The thing that had made him do it—babble away like a jackass—was just this feeling he'd been having more and more lately, the feeling of having to talk to somebody who'd known him earlier. Because it was beginning to seem to him that he was traveling in a circle, and had been all his life. He was just now coming back to where he'd been as a kid. If he could get a bearing from somebody, if only someone who'd seen him pass that way before could call out to him and say, "You turned left when you were here last time," or something of that kind.

So he'd babbled. Partly though, to grant himself something, Robb's

letters *had* seemed to ask a lot of questions, as if he were interested. Prying bastard. No, no, that wasn't fair. He wondered how plausible it would sound if he claimed to have been drunk.

Now why in hell would he say he'd been drunk? Of course he wouldn't.

But a God damned autobiography, practically! Because that's what it had been. A radio serial, something on that order! *Remember, folks? When we last saw dear old George Morley, he was—*What? What had the bastard been doing? Hopping a railroad, probably; with a stolen orange in his pocket.

Sure, an absolute autobiography. Starting with when he'd come back from Spain. Not skipping anything. Telling about those months (or had it been years? he couldn't remember) when he'd bummed all over the country, begging food like a tramp, sleeping in barns.

And then his gorge rose; he remembered writing, "I was looking for something. Either sanity or an honest man." Robb would think he'd lost a bolt.

And then very poetic. He'd turned very poetic describing the lumber camp in Minnesota. The scenery. The smells. How the air made him feel like an old Roman god; morning, noon and night. Now wasn't that interesting?

Well, it couldn't be helped, a lot of wet spilled milk. Yet he tried particularly hard to forget one line. It came close to the end. *If my name isn't anathema to Betty, give her my love, will you, Robb? Because she's the only one I ever gave it to.* How did you dare say something like that to the brother of the girl you'd jilted? It was true, but how in hell did a guy *dare*? He sent Robb a beseeching telepathic message, "Forget it. Don't mention me to anybody. Forget the whole blasted mess, will you?"

He wished he could go to see Rue. But they'd shipped Rue out. He might even be actually fighting by now. And he hadn't seemed to be scared, either, the way George had expected him to be. Hell, no. The noble valiant lieutenant. George pictured him throwing hand grenades: "Up, men, and follow me!" and so on.

Still, he didn't mean to be poking fun at him. Certainly he'd never belittled courage. Not any kind of it. Though there were so many kinds of it, and one or two were pretty Hollywoodish, drums sounding and bugles blowing. Apparently courage was something you didn't run out of, once you had it. And you could start out not hav-

ing too much of it, and then acquire it later, like Johnny. Or you could change one brand for another. He'd had quite a few different sorts, himself. First the courage a guy has if he's never been beaten, the strong animal sure of his own strength. Next, he'd got himself a kind of valor: he'd loved life, but he'd been glad to try to swap it for an idea. And when the idea went to nothing and life was left, he hadn't known what to do with it; so the oddest sort of courage of all had come up: he'd taken a job as a stunt man with a circus. He hadn't been in the market for any more ideas, and not so crazy in love with life any more; so it had been all right with him to hear the crowd shouting, wanting his blood, whenever he lay beneath the elephant's hoof or made his quick soaring trajectory from the cannon. Of course perhaps they'd merely been praising his bravery. He'd wondered which it was sometimes, but, whichever, it had mattered approximately as much as nothing. (And Christ! If he remembered right, he'd written Robb all that part, too! Chapter IX: My Circus Days.)

Finally, a nerveless automatic sort of courage: the sort a man certainly has if he goes back to lumbering for the second season. Definitely the kind a man has if he becomes a logger and, especially, a topper. A kind of valor somewhat like the first: with joy in it, and strength. Different chiefly just by skill being such a big part of it.

But never in his life had he needed courage so much as he needed it in the Army. Courage, mainly, to contain himself, not to burst out in fury. Even, until that night with the English prostitute, courage not to surrender to the agony he hadn't understood.

He supposed he'd have it, courage, until he died. One way or another. Now that Johnny'd found it, he too would have it, probably, until he died. They were alike then, in that much.

Which was precisely how the wheel seemed to keep turning with him. He'd been like Johnny once before, or perhaps it was Rue who'd been like him, at any rate they'd borrowed from each other. And then the furthest opposite, they'd been altogether different from each other: with Johnny permitting Gladys to become more important than any ideal, while George, like a zealous priest fighting temptation, was reducing Betty to less and less. And next they had been counterbalanced on the Ferris wheel: it was Rue who had the automobile, the name, the tailored clothes, it was Rue who slept with good-looking fashionable women, and it was George who said, "Yes,

sir!" and waited in line, and saluted first, and who was instructed by his betters not to think. ("An enlisted man's most important duty is to know he can not think," George's Major often said.)

Now at last this business of seeing them as really alike, after all. Understanding that Rue in battle would be much as he'd been in battle; that they weren't different.

Not for that, but for a hundred things like that, he'd written to Robb, *I keep getting the feeling: this is where I came in, Nixon. I keep getting that feeling. It's not bad, not painful or nerve-racking or anything too rough to take. But it's confusing. Apparently I've been traveling in some sort of circle.*

Furiously, he regretted writing the letter. And yet knew he didn't regret it at all. Because if only Robb would answer him: *I saw you when you were here before. You turned off at an angle, I think it was just about here. You went left. . . .* If that could happen, it would be sure. It would be easy to see which course to choose now.

When the reply came, it was a long letter, perhaps half a dozen pages. Inside the large envelope was a smaller one, sealed, containing pictures. Robb ordered him not to open this one until he'd finished reading, and he obeyed.

After investigating the small one, though, he began shouting till the barracks echoed. He clapped the man next him so hard the fellow almost swallowed his cigarette.

But when they surrounded him, the other noncoms, asking what had happened, what he'd read, he suddenly fell silent, and put the pictures away.

"I've just become a father," would most definitely not have done. Besides, it was too inaccurate.

"I just found out where to go, which turn it is I've got to try to make differently," would only have got him booked with the chaplain. Or the medics, probably.

10 June

My Darling Gladys,

I'm sorry I couldn't write to you for so long. You'll notice my A.P.O. has changed. That's why.

Where I am now is a country that isn't really a country of people at all. Not human beings. They look like human beings, and they walk around like them and all. But they're not.

I suppose I shouldn't say that, because I'm judging the whole country by what I've been looking at, and what I've been doing.

But the whole country is involved in letting such things go on. Where I used to be stationed I used to know a man who always said, "No man is an island." Gladys, think about that. No man is an island. In that country, there was something free. A feeling of being free. In the streets, wherever you'd go. Like in our own country. (We don't think about it, at home, very much. But we do think about it *some*, don't we! But white people probably don't at all. But in this country where I am now—there can't have been that feeling for a long time—for anybody. Everything, everything about them says they don't even want to be free. The women don't want to be free, they want to be conquered and ordered around. Made to walk behind their husbands and carry things. That's just a tiny example. Everybody here wants to be ordered around and to be kicked and then to kick somebody else even harder. I hate these people. I despise these people. They aren't people.

They're machine-animals. No, I've got to keep remembering I'm judging them just by what I've been doing, where I've been looking. They can't all be like that, but I don't care. I can't help it: no man is an island. Why did they let it go on? I've been in a prison, working in one of their prisons and opening it up. Where they kept prisoners of a certain race. And political prisoners too. But mainly prisoners of this one certain race.

Gladys, I love you. I want to cling to you. I keep feeling sometimes if I can't see you right away, if I can't absolutely lose myself in you right away, I'll just disappear in some huge black throb of pain that I feel going on around me all the time now. Since I did this kind of work. Helping to open up this prison.

Nothing matters to me any more, except to get back with you and to make sure you're the way I remember you. I don't care anything about anything else.

My Darling Gladys,

This is the next day.

I read that over and I'm going to let it go. It sounds a little crazy, but that can't be helped.

It has one lie in it. It says I couldn't write to you because I was being transferred. I was being trans. all right, but the reason I couldn't write to you is that—well, I didn't see battle, the big fine smashy bang-bang

battle I was so thrilled about, how I was going to do in it and all, but I got assigned to this work—of helping to open this prison up—and after that I was in hospital, because I kept vomiting and I had the diarrhea and they thought I had a bug. When one of the medics found out I'd been an artist, he said it was just nerves, and all he did was just give me some pills and fixed it with the Quartermaster Major so I'm with them here now and will not have to go back to that other work at all. He said, this doctor, that it wasn't a breakdown, it wasn't even battle fatigue. But it just affected me.

He had me talk to him a long time and he asked me all about my family, not you Honey—I mean my early family—he must have asked about one thousand questions. Once I happened to say something about Ma smacking Archie around. He said, "What did you do, usually?" And I said, "Walk around the block."

"What if you couldn't, what if it was storming outside?" And I said nothing at first, but sometimes I'd make a sketch, later, I said.

"Of her beating him?" And when I said yes, he told me perhaps it will be the same way this time. That later I'll make sketches. Of what I saw.

He happens to be of this same race as these prisoners. (As long as I live, I'm never going to name anyone's race again. Everybody is going to be the son of Adam. And I mean I'm going to think of them that way too. That's the first thing to make these prisons not happen again. Only you see I just can't regard the people who run this country right here as people. You see how shaky my writing is getting. That means I have to go rest. See you later.

Good Morning, Good Wife. My Gladys-Wife,

I feel much better today. And you are absolutely not to worry about that shaky stuff, Honey. The doctor told me it's really a good sign. Some of the worst ones don't shake at all, he says. Every day I get better. Your picture knows all about it.

I think I'll finish telling you about the doctor. So he is very wrong about me ever doing anything to show these prisons later. He understands me pretty well but not about how I paint. If I ever tried to make a sketch about it my hand would splinter like a dynamited rock and my tongue would come out like Picasso's *Guernica* and the paper would turn out to be poison to touch.

Because, Gladys, I have been trying to make sketches of other things—not of that—for a long time now and if it's a human being I sketch, the bones turn out to be like the poor bones in there. Of the prisoners. And the flesh—no, no, no, no, no. No, Gladys, it didn't happen! These things could *not* have happened.

Then even the trees. If I even do trees or skies, the trees seem to get dark spirits in them—saying we will order the people to do this or that, all cruelty, because we want to feel the screaming go through all our branches— So if I try nonobjectives just the plain colors turn out to have the sinister grays and dull blacked reds. If I do abstractions, the shapes turn out to have identification. Terrible, terrible identifications I wasn't meaning at all.

No, no. I'm all right. Don't worry about me, Darling.

I want you to be fat when I come back. Please, Gladys. Seriously, just the way you used to be, only fat instead of thin. I don't want to see anybody's bones for a long time.

No, the doctor was wrong. But I'll paint again.

And never ask me about this time. The work I was doing before I had to go to hospital.

Some of the other people beat them, the ones who'd been running it. I said no to myself—not to them—because I didn't want to touch them, the ones who had been running it. But yes naturally I did want them to be dead. When there used to be lynchings in the South, it was like a hate that wasn't there all the time but just sometimes. And the people were sorry afterwards I always thought, even as soon as the next morning and would say it was the crazy mob that did it. Not them. Even if they were in the mob. But here you see it went on all the time. You can't imagine they were sorry the next morning, because the next morning they just started all over again.

Now all that is past. It's gone. It's got to stay gone.

I am never going to say another word about it. Or even think about it.

This is what I want to tell you now. Gladys, I didn't understand that there is nothing noble or good about the military stuff, the fighting stuff, the strong power stuff, all—the ladder of hurt, where everybody gets kicked and has somebody to kick harder under him. All the things that are pain one way or another. I guess I thought when I'd tell people I used to be an artist before the War, it really would have been better to say I'd always been a Lieutenant. I'm so ashamed I ever looked at it like that I could die. I am an artist, I *am* an artist!

You to me are all the other things. You are love. And every time a person passes up love, spits at it in any way, he's saying YES to hate. All that is hate—everything that isn't love is Hate.

I want to be out of this right away. There's no more danger, as you know, where I am. I have to tell you some more. I have to confess something else I'm ashamed of: I used to look at myself in the mirror and tell myself what hot stuff I was. Not as an artist. Not as a human

being, not as somebody loving you. But as a great big warrior-type, ready for action—which is to say, the K-I-L-L!—cool and merciless. Oh, yes, Gladys. (But you've got to love me anyway, I'm past all that now, you've got to now, I mean it, I'm not kidding.)

I'm even going to say another thing that is about as easy to say as holding my hand in fire would be. But if I don't say it, you'll think all your life you've got something better for a husband than you really have. But you must stay with me and never leave me, all the same. You've got to, Gladys. (Please burn this letter up, when you're finished.) But I can't help it. What I'm going to say now is that in England a lot of things went to my head. And so I thought I was a pretty big gun in lots of ways. You see what I mean? Like I more or less thought you were lucky to have me. I knew all the time I was lucky too, to have you, but— What finally turned out to show itself is that if everything goes OK for me I can't stand it, I get puffed up— A toad. With his own nothing.

But when I started being sick like this I'd wake up on the hospital bed and I'd know what I always knew: where there's anything green or golden in me, it's you. And where there's anything false and conceited or washed-out and dead in me, it's where you didn't get to yet.

I love you and that's all I am and all I want to be: just somebody that loves you and that can say in his work that he does.

And what you are is somebody who is finally going to make me not hate even this nation. This people who like all that hate part so much, the military and the strutting, the crazy patriotism stuff, and singing songs saying their country over everything else—

I guess you might say you see where you've got your work cut out for you, eh, Glad?

Darling, next time I promise I'll be very calm and not scare you. You notice how long I went today and still not shaking much?

Yoli,
Johnny

A Day of Decision,

Dear Virgil,

PROPOSITION

By the time you read this (if you will grant me the privilege for old times' sake of beginning a letter in the ancient tradition of melodrama, as who among us hasn't always longed to?), by the time you read, I shall

have fled this San Francisco chilled-muted summer. And I shall be in the sun and released from several of my prisons. I believe I shall be on a park bench in a place called Pershing Square in Los Angeles. Pickpockets and plainclothesmen and poets sit there in the sun, side by side, watching the secretaries go by. Surely you remember it? And religious fanatics and dope-dreamers blaze and glow there. An entrancing place. Or possibly, instead, I shall be on some fishing pier in Ensenada, Baja California, Mexicans always having seemed soft and alien to me, like a mother's breast. More probably still—because it's closer—I'll be resting myself just outside some public bath at Santa Monica Beach. At any rate, I'll have a wineflask in my pocket, Benthwick, and—I'm almost certain—I'll be writing poetry.

EXPLANATION

The Gotharh magazine, one week ago today, offered me its Poetry Editor's chair. There's a bald fact for you, certainly. Want another? Take this, then. By the self-same post, old chap, *The Atlantic Monthly* accepted a 3,000 word appraisal of the significance of contemporary literary patterns, the poetic scene especially, I'd sent them about one month before. I rejoiced, mildly. (A three day Nirvana.) Upon returning to reality—retching splendidly upon my own person, and striking my head bloody against the toilet seat—every second, every inch the poet—I grasped at last the significance of my own pattern. This, my dearest own deadly own pattern.

And saw I suppose what you must have seen about yourself, for your self, at least five years ago. There is a destination to be reached and it will be reached whether the journey is made quickly or slowly. Yours was toward humiliation, pain, masochistic ecstasies. Such longings were in you—I hazard the guess—since the first day you knew yourself to be regarded coldly or regarded not at all. Longings that seized unrelinquishable power as early as that moment in the womb when you heard your presence announced to the Sire—it strikes me as not improbable—and heard next his long sigh, his noncommittal "Oh?" And you had the wit, my only friend Benthwick, to hasten to your journey's end as soon as you'd got the skill for it, as soon as you became a man. I revere you. Most sincerely, for your no-nonsense alacrity. Nor am I very irritated with you for your surprising deceit against me: that you would pretend, from time to time, to dissuade me from my own course—the doddering, smothering, sweet-as-slime, comforting-as-canines'-loyalty hypochondria I was born to favor. Not even irritated at your occasional absurd little affectation of lecturing me against liver-abuse!

Because part of your very course was not to admit—not to admit to

yourself at first, not to admit to me finally—that you saw your course at all. For what does humiliation amount to, indeed how pale it is, when the humiliated has too overtly sought it, besought it? (I do you no dis-service by naming the matter at this point. You've seen it, obviously, and will not have to face my seeing it, the latest time we met being the last time.)

Yet friendship is an unreasonable insatiable beggar. I upbraid only to this extent: you might have saved me some time, I think, with a word. As it was, in my dullness, I had to travel all the way to outside victory before understanding my goal had always been an inside one. Editorship on *The Gotham*! How whiningly friendly to the world such a thing would be—for a creature born so honestly incompatible to it!

DESCRIPTION OF UNWANTED PERSON

It's my understanding that incoming mail is not read at your establishment by servile vigilant diligent eyes, but possibly I am mistaken. In any event, courtesy demands the following little note. Please forgive the interruption.

Dear Guard:

By the time you read this, the undersigned will have become a wife-deserter. Might be sought in arcas previously designated. Will not resist arrest if apprehended, but neither will support wife. Is tall and lean and dark and stoop-shouldered and has slight limp. Appears to be ill, and frequently is. Rarely appears to be drunk, but frequently is. It would be shrewd of you to imagine he wears glasses, and yet (it surprises me as well) you'd be wrong. Increasingly, there is a tremor in his hands.

(signed) Marion McNaughton

FURTHER PROJECTION OF IMMEDIATE PLAN

Virgil, again: The dreadful Iva Tillie continues to make indecent overtures to me. She will crawl on all fours, such is her shameless twitching promise. She will revere my superiority totally. She professes, in short, to entertain every ambition of acquiring intensified fulsomeness and nauseousness. She hounded me to the degree, indeed, that I had to abandon my library job even before picking up my severance pay! And then, cruel hunter hiding at the sole watering place, she lurked behind a pillar in the post office—where of course I had to go for the messages described in opening ¶'s. Wailing and crying again: she is with child, she has invented now this new horror. With child! Less apathetic on-lookers might have lynched me on the spot. Because I fled, disengaging myself from her arms in savage panic. (No apology. Dante himself would

have dropped his quill and run, confronted with such a demon as she showed herself that day!)

I had already seen my predetermined course quite plainly, but I confess that this terrible episode emphatically strengthened my decision.

PHILOSOPHICAL SUMMARY

The world must not be regarded seriously. No attempt must be made to deal with it, to succeed in it. It is a fool's place, and—as in my darkest, most honest heart I always knew—it has no value at all except in so far as it may be translatable into Art. Warped and straightened by the astigmatic creating-destroying eye. In short, only to the degree that one's own vision—my own vision—can purify and correct it, is the world tolerable.

And now that I have found my point of view (our point of view, for you preceded me), no other seems supportable. On the rare occasions I doubt my decision, and falter in arrogance enough to consider myself arrogant, I remind myself only of the eternal invariable popularity of every idiot's delight yet discovered or invented: warfare, advertising, religion, manufactured art, honking automobiles. Then I am immediately reassured at having severed connections, at having withdrawn myself from the enemy; and from the enemy's ethics, and the enemy's rewards, and from the enemy's punishments.

For example, the dreadful Iva Tillie. If she really is with child (not that I believe for one moment that she is), nothing on earth could induce me to accept the burden of its life. For one thing, it would of course be appallingly female: Iva and her mother would automatically femalize (a far subtler and more damaging operation than castration) any offspring left in their care for a period exceeding twenty-four hours; no argument about that. And for another, it would have to be made of poor material. My body's weakness may be forgivable, possibly even interesting and profitable (besides, might easily be compensated for entirely by Iva's voracity), but the mark of the cat—cruelty—would be too plainly on it. The child, if it exists, already frightens me. (Because the woman is a monster, Benthwick, out and out. At the library, it was her dearest sport to disembowel underlings, especially to de-pride the men, and then to display the missing parts dressed out in lavender.) I do not recognize this child as my responsibility. I cannot. A mistaken, wandering sperm, captured out of season by merciless, insatiable Will to Dominate.

A FAREWELL

Even as you read—imagine what luck, Benthwick!—I shall have escaped, shall already have accomplished a few of the necessary prison-

breaks. I shall have become at least a beachcomber. After the war, possibly, I'll graduate to directing U.S. tourists in Mexico to the choicest brothels; eventually I may even be taken up as a fad by the friendly Hollywood madmen.

But wherever I am, I shall be writing poetry, my poetry, *not-for-sale* poetry. And shall not be encumbered by having to placate the enemy. And I shall be bathing the ever-riled intestines in tubful after tubful of warm, cheap wine.

McNaughton

15 June

Dear R——

The bearer of this letter, Sergeant S., has been a fine friend to me, and if he's still there while you open it please thank him and give him a drink. He's taking a terrible chance in smuggling a letter out, so please thank him very much.

But don't read on, after this paragraph, until you're alone. He's a very great guy and would do anything in the world for me (and has absolutely no idea why). He's married and has four children and no imagination whatsoever. And no tolerance, by the way. But he would no more open this letter or lose it than you would. I mean no matter what. I think even if his life depended on it.

O.K. Now I guess we're alone.

Oh, God. Oh, God, R—— I wish this part were over.

This is the kind of letter I had to write without having anyone else read it. I'm not clever enough to say what I've got to tell you without making it plain to a Censor. (Thank you, by the way, among the million things I have to thank you for, for making me a little brighter than I used to be. It was a long, hard struggle, I know.)

I'm stationed in a new place. I'm on another island in the same ocean. It's small and not famous. The fighting is all over here. In fact there never was much here. It's just a kind of stopping-off place en route to bloodier areas.

R—— there is nothing on earth I wouldn't give not to have to write this letter.

Except the one thing that would make it not necessary to write it.

Now I see probably I'd better try to be careful for your sake. (So far as *I'm* concerned, I'd almost have mailed it. I'm not in the least worried about being connected with anything in this letter: believe me, the Army doesn't worry me now. All it wants me to do is risk my life the way it's

taught me to do in the fighting I'll be in soon. As funny as it may sound, the Army may even wind up giving *me* a bronze star! Because I'm all courage, R——. For the first time in my life. Anyway, where I'm headed for you don't have to sign certificates of orthodoxy to join the club. In fact, some people try to get out of the whole mess by doing just the opposite—but it hardly ever works.)

My only worry is that somehow the letter would be traced to you if it were lost, if Sergeant S. should be hit by lightning or something. But your name and address aren't on it, and I guess I'll have to go ahead and take the chance.

Because there's no other way I know to tell you what I've got to tell you. And would almost rather be scalped than tell you.

I thought one time of just never writing you again and more or less pretending I'd died. Maybe that would have been a better idea, at that.

I'll start with something I suppose you already know. All my life I 'had a funny thing of being afraid. I was always afraid of everybody. Except you, and maybe one or two other people. I was afraid of everything, and sometimes I was afraid of nothing, or that is to say I didn't know what I was afraid of. I can remember a long time ago wishing I were George because he never seemed to be afraid.

Well, then if anything happened that I could logically say: here is what I'm afraid of, in a way it was better because— Well, you can see whv. Because the very worst thing was to be afraid without knowing why.

And you used to talk to me at Laguna when I'd get nervous, God, how you've helped me! I know perfectly well you saved my mind. That's why I can't understand how I can do what I'm doing right now.

But— Oh Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ.

Yet even if you helped me, I don't remember ever coming right out and telling you about always having this little sickening nervous thing inside me that was always going on like a tiny silent screaming. The only thing that would stop it, I found out what it was, when I was about seven years old, was Art. And so painting right away started to be so much to me that— For example, sometimes I used to wonder if I'd still be able to paint if for some reason I no longer had this sort of tiny silent screaming going on, and I'd decide every time probably I wouldn't be able to. Then, again every time, I'd think, well, I would rather have this nervous thing and paint than not have it and not paint. By a thousand times, at least, I'd rather. Yet it was very bad. (I doubt even *you* can begin to see *how* bad. Sometimes it was so bad it must be like a dope addict when he can't get the stuff. But there was no stuff, see, for me to get. Only painting made the wanting—or the constant silent screaming or what-

ever you'd call it—go away. You said once you had to be calm to paint—it literally scared me to death, almost. I thought if you were like that, and you were the sanest person I knew, and I was exactly opposite, I must be—well, really. . . .

I suppose all this is by way of excuse for what I'm going to say. But nevertheless it was necessary, I had to describe it. Because you *must* not think that I just don't care. You've got to see how terribly important this—what I'm going to say—is to me.

I met this person—a Captain, three months ago.

Once in a while, for a joke, he acts Irish. He looks Irish, but he really isn't at all. Naturally I'm not going to say his name, even though it's possible you'd remember it if I did. (Because of all the fantastic wonders in this world, you've met him! Once at his wedding reception and then at a bar, years later. He's even been inside our wonderful house where you saved my mind in Laguna!—I've lived so many places, and yet that was the only home I ever had.)

At any rate, I told him yesterday I was going to write you today and send it with S., and he said to tell you you were right: the murals are "wrong," and you are "right," and I am the one who proves to him the murals are "wrong." This part I don't understand at all. You usually don't talk about art, of any kind, as being either right or wrong. But that's all he'll say.

We agree, he and I, that you are among the finest, if not the finest one, of all the people we've ever known in our lives. Now I've come down to it. Now I've got to say it.

When I met him, the first time I ever saw him, it occurred to me, like in a dream, that here was the way for this secret constant fear in me to disappear, to have it killed. And yet not lose painting. I just stared and stared at him. I couldn't get over it. I never experienced anything even remotely like it.

Of course right away I became more terrified than ever: he looked as if he'd be a very dangerous sort of person, if he so much as thought for an instant— If he could ever even see into another person's mind, like mine.

I experienced something, R—— that I never had thought I would. I suppose it's not unusual. You certainly have experienced it. And many other people I've known personally. I myself—and I was not worthy for this to be so, since the thing itself is so much better or bigger than I was—often seem to inspire it. I used to wonder what it was like, when I saw it happen to other people. I was positive it could never happen to me (I told myself that was the way I felt about my painting), but I was curious. When I found out how it was, I half-way wished I could get

out of it—it was so much stronger than I'd imagined. But there's no way at all of getting out of it: it's much stronger than a person is.

If you can't understand what I'm saying, my dear R——, just read this over and over. Because it's important that you understand and I don't know how to say it any better.

There was nothing for it. His voice used to ruin me: I sketched his left hand, or his right ear (I used to decide ahead of time on some feature to concentrate on, so I wouldn't have to look at him all at once—say at mess or at an officers' meeting—because if I looked at him all at once I thought I'd give everything away), his voice used to ruin me because I couldn't find the right colors for it for so long.

I beg your pardon for telling you all this, but I still think you've got to see how important, to me, it is.

Then the piano at the club finally got fixed (a machine gun went off accidentally once and bunged it up when some kids were fooling with the silencer), and he started playing the piano.

He'd said things like *pass the salt* a few times to me, but I never answered him at all, being afraid of how things might go, as I just told you. But when I heard the way he played the piano it was obvious he was not at all the sort of person who'd think you should be killed if he could see inside your mind.

If this part now sounds stupid you'll know it's because I can't think how else to say it, to tell you: the island we were on became enchanted, completely enchanted, and even the color of khaki changed to a really singing, really alive warm color. I am not afraid of the battles coming up, because I know I can't possibly die or have anything too awful happen to me. This is the truth, I'm not just talking like a silly fool. I'm not sure fire would burn me or water drown me.

This is enough then, R—— I've nothing more to say about it.

We're going to live in Mexico City after the war, or some place he's been in South America. As long as I live, I'll never see you again, and I can't believe that even if I know it. Am I in prison that I won't see you? Have you died, that I won't see you? I can't understand how it could be possible that we'll both be alive in the same world at the same time and free and yet not see each other.

But you'll remember you said, if it ever happened, you wouldn't want to see me again, ever, and we wouldn't go down to that weakish business of being friends. I thought at that time how silly, what would it matter, because certainly we never made a great thing of being absolutely faithful, and we'd be *friends* anyway till we died. I mean we couldn't help being friends. But of course now I see you were right. At that time I didn't know anything at all about how complicated—it all is. How

vulnerable it makes us. It seemed to me like a civilized or polite thing to say, "We'll still be friends." Now I see no barbarian could figure out any crueller torture.

This Captain believes in fidelity like a religion, by the way. He says that their lack of it is the main thing wrong with a certain type of person. I agree. But of course I agree with everything he says.

I've no way of showing how I feel about the part of this that concerns you. As I already said, it's unbelievable to me that I can be doing this to you. It's like I was killing myself, in a way, under hypnosis.

There is just nothing I can say, that's all—

I got your letter about George and Betty. That's fine. I wrote my lawyer Thompson about splitting up the money, in two. They should certainly have half, if they'll take it. If they won't take it, it's to be put in trust for the kids.

A little hunk is on its way to your bank, for you, if you'll have it. If you won't, maybe you'd be good enough to use it to help VB when he gets out of prison, or to pay MM's doctor and/or liquor bills or for JR's contribution to that society for the advancement of colored people. If nobody will have anything to do with the money (it's not a big slice), maybe you'd arrange to give it to some art school or scholarship fund.

You used to think I should try to look my family up and give them something. No, I wouldn't and I won't. Just as I'll never have a family of my own, I never was in anybody else's either.

I have no idea at all of how to say goodbye to you.

T.